

Actualité en France

No. 17 – June 2010

France to host the European Football Championship in 2016

France has won Euro 2016... At least, for now, the right to stage this major football competition. As well as the global sensation and keen interest it generates, this sporting event will have a significant knock-on effect for the French economy.



A lot was at stake: the European Football Championship is an extremely significant international event (the third largest world sporting event in terms of media coverage). The 2016 event will be on an unprecedented scale as it will be the first to be played by 24 teams instead of 16 in the past.

As a candidate for staging Euro 2016, France put forward a good bid and focused effectively on its advantages, enabling it to pip Turkey at the post. Even though the French president of UEFA, Michel Platini, former number 10 in the France team that won Euro 1984 in Paris, remained deliberately neutral and did not participate in the vote, the Union of European Football Associations no doubt took on board the certainty provided by the French candidacy, in terms of both organisation and benefits.

Having hosted other major international sporting events in the past, such as Euro 1984 and the World Cup in 1998, France was able to highlight its experience, expertise and excellent organisational abilities, essential to ensure the smooth running of the competition. Other major advantages include the quality of its hotel accommodation and a transport network covering the whole country and in which additional investment has already been made, such as work on the Gare Saint-Jean station in Bordeaux to serve the TGV (high-speed trains).

Just one stumbling block remained: the stadiums. “*France’s stadiums as a whole are obsolete,*” observes Laurent Wetzel, assistant editor-in-chief on the magazine France Football. “*Building new stadiums is an absolute and vital economic obligation*”. One figure enabled France to score the “decisive goal”: 1.7 billion euros. That is the budget, combining public and private finance, which will be invested in the construction and renovation of its sports venues. Twelve stadiums have been preselected to host the matches. Out of these, nine will be chosen and three will be kept in reserve.



MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES ET EUROPÉENNES

Only one is ready now: the Stade de France in Saint-Denis. Four new stadiums will be built, in Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon and Nice. Eight others will undergo significant renovations: the Parc des Princes in Paris, Félix-Bollaert in Lens, La Meinau in Strasbourg, Marcel-Picot in Nancy, Geoffroy-Guichard in Saint-Etienne, the Vélodrome in Marseille and the Stadium Municipal in Toulouse.

The development of this modern generation of sports venues should give new impetus to French football, both professional and amateur. It is estimated that the average capacity of French stadiums will expand from 27,000 to 35,000 spectators and, according to research published by a specialist in sports sponsorship and marketing, this renewal will generate 183 million euros in additional revenue for the clubs.

“France is going to be able to modernise its sports infrastructure and offer a unifying project for the next ten years,” declared Jean-Pierre Escalettes, president of the French Football Federation.

Football in fact gives rise to sustained and intense economic activity: *“Contrary to the transient economic impact of the Olympic Games, the organisation of a European football championship produces a legacy for several decades,”* observes sports analyst Nicolas Fernandez. It has already been calculated that winning the bid to stage Europe 2016 will generate 15,000 jobs in the building and public works sector, for the construction and renovation phase, and 4,500 long-term jobs in maintenance of the sites. A godsend for the regions concerned. The city and regional authorities played an important part in preparing the bid. They also expect spin-offs from Euro 2016 in terms of enhanced reputation, tourism and of course increased visitor numbers during the competition. Fifty-one matches will be held in nine host cities and should each attract an average of 50,000 spectators. In total, 2.5 million spectators are expected and the hospitality facilities (sports villages, giant screens, etc.) around the competition venues will be able to welcome 1.3 million additional supporters.

“Media coverage will be considerable and global, and the repercussions planetary,” stresses Laurent Wetzell. *“And it is an event that can galvanise a sense of fellow feeling and engender considerable popular enthusiasm”*. Euro 2016 is set to be a great celebration; one of the main themes of the French candidacy, in fact, focused on its social aspect. Winning on the pitch is another matter... The last two football competitions hosted on French soil, Euro 1984 and the 1998 World Cup, were won by *Les Bleus*. And if the famous saying, *good things come in threes*, is to be believed, hope springs eternal!

Sylvie Thomas