
A match made in heaven



*by Lennart Johansson,
chairman of the European
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As punters and the media gradually lost interest in the old International Football Cup IFC, played to provide pools with a summer schedule of games, Tipstjänst's Lars-Gunnar Björklund and his colleagues began to ponder what could be done and urged Richard Frigren as President of Intertoto, and myself as chairman of the European Football Pool (the organisation made up of European gaming companies who finance the Intertoto Cup), to «do something».

Soon we decided the summer cup should in some way be linked to one of the UEFA cups, most naturally the UEFA Cup itself. Tipstjänst's marketing department proposed that the group winners should compete for places in the UEFA Cup's qualifying rounds. Participating teams would benefit from higher revenues from gaming companies and television coverage.

That sounded great: matches would be of a higher standard since the big clubs throughout Europe showed an interest, a better product would increase

income from gaming companies and, hopefully, subsidies for football in general would grow.

The two of us who had been thrown the challenge were now faced with a tricky job. Football people are a conservative species and the gaming companies are no exception. They'd rather talk about what can't be done than what can.

Eventually, we managed to convince the European Football Pools board of the project's merits. Now, only UEFA's Executive Committee, of which I am chairman, was left to convince. After a great deal of resistance, the committee agreed, mainly because of the resolute help by German Football Association chairman Egidius Braun, a man who can face down the strongest opposition.

We soon discovered that nothing is easy at the beginning. Dominating countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and England, either gave up or made things difficult by backing out at the last minute.

Fortunately, the previously negative attitude of the German coaches changed when they discovered their teams came to the league start better prepared than after the usual summer break. And what was even better: Girondins de Bordeaux qualified, first via the UEFA Intertoto Cup, and after 18 matches, for the final UEFA Cup game against Bayern München. That certainly did the trick.

Interest in the UEFA Intertoto Cup is on the rise and it is my hope and conviction that soon even the big boys will dance.

If this happens everybody wins: the clubs with increased revenue and better preparation, the gaming companies with increased revenue, and UEFA with yet another prestigious cup. □