



Switzerland - a stronghold in European football, 1930–1954?

Grégory Quin & Philippe Vonnard

To cite this article: Grégory Quin & Philippe Vonnard (2015): Switzerland - a stronghold in European football, 1930–1954?, Sport in History, DOI: [10.1080/17460263.2015.1071083](https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2015.1071083)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2015.1071083>



Published online: 30 Oct 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 4



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Switzerland - a stronghold in European football, 1930–1954?

Grégory Quin^a and Philippe Vonnard^b

^aDe Montfort University, Leicester, UK; ^bUniversity of Lausanne, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the First World War, the practice of football underwent rapid development in continental Europe as a professional sport as well as a new diplomatic instrument. This article aims to analyse the role and the involvement of Swiss football leaders in this context of commercialisation, mediatisation and politicisation, from the 1930s to 1954, when in the same year Swiss officials organised the World Cup and held the Basel congress, which laid the first stone of a European governing body: the Union des Associations Européennes de Football (UEFA). The analysis of those officials' involvement stresses the importance of the role played by Switzerland in the administration of the game (the headquarters of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association have been based in Zurich since 1932, the UEFA moved to Bern in 1960), in the organisation of a great number of international games and competitions for clubs (Coupe de Nations in 1930) and national teams (World Cup in 1954), but also more broadly in the international relations, where sport – and especially football – was increasingly used as a tool of diplomacy in changing geopolitical configuration.

Introduction

The last few years have seen significant developments in the study of the place of football in European societies. Historians, as well as economists and sociologists, have been trying to show that, since the inter-war years, this practice has brought together the continent's inhabitants and that it is a vector for the construction of European identity¹ and a form of Europeanisation.² As such, it would appear of interest to prolong this dynamic by focusing on the actors (administrators and officials, football associations, states, etc.) who have contributed to this process, not only for motives linked to the expression of ideologies,³ as a tool of diplomacy,⁴ but also as a manifestation of economic interests.⁵

On that basis, this article aims to analyse the role of Switzerland and its top football administrators and officials in the development of their sport in Europe from the middle of the inter-war period up to 1954 when the

European governing body UEFA was founded. These officials' involvement also shows the importance of the role played by Switzerland in the administration of the beautiful game (FIFA, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, has had its headquarters there since 1932 and UEFA since 1960), in the number of matches played by the Swiss national team since the inter-war period; and finally in the hosting of important competitions on Swiss soil (the European Nations Cup in 1930, the World Cup in 1954, the European Championship in 2008). We start from the premise that the attitude of Swiss officials corresponds to a position of mediator as exercised by the Swiss Confederation on the international stage. In this sense, the Swiss government, since the inter-war period, has encouraged investment in areas considered a priori less political, such as culture⁶ and science,⁷ in order to assert its independence in international relations, in particular by improving its image as a benefactor vis-à-vis other nations.

In this context, sport – and particularly football – could also be used to satisfy the same interests. That said, despite its popularity, it has only rarely been put under the microscope by historians, even if pioneer studies by Pierre Lanfranchi⁸ and Christian Koller,⁹ and more recent publications give useful food for further thought on the role of Switzerland in the emergence of football as a European-wide phenomenon,¹⁰ by following the directions, it should be said, indicated by Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young in their state-of-the-art review of the historiography of European sport.¹¹

To back up our analyses, we have used documents (such as minutes of management committees, or correspondence between members) from the archival collections of the Swiss Football Association (ASFA – Association Suisse de Football et Athlétisme) and of FIFA. We have cross-referenced these finding with the institutional archives found in the collections of the Swiss Confederation's Department of Foreign Affairs. The study would not have been complete without our reading of the country's various mainstream newspapers (*La Gazette de Lausanne* and *la Tribune de Genève*) as well as the specialist sporting press (*Le Sport Suisse*).

1930–1938: new commitment to European Football

Emerging from the First World War, the practice of football underwent rapid development in Europe against the background of the commercialisation and mediatisation of its elite form. Switzerland participated in this phenomenon, seeing the building of numerous stadiums, the creation of a national cup competition and a trend towards a monopoly by the ASFA of the administration of the game across the whole of the national territory.¹² Internationally, Swiss officials became very active in establishing lasting exchanges, over and above tensions left over from the war, as shown by the organisation of a

Switzerland–Germany match in 1920.¹³ This ambition was made possible by Swiss neutrality, recognised since the London Conference of 1815 and confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles (1919) in its Article 435.¹⁴ However, in the 1930s, the type of neutrality adopted by the government was ‘differential’, allowing involvement in international organisations and participation in international exchanges and trade. Thus, Switzerland took part in discussions within the League of Nations (LN), created after the end of the war and whose headquarters was based in Geneva.

Switzerland hosts FIFA’s administrative headquarters

Until the end of the 1920s, FIFA had no offices of its own; the personal residence of the secretary and treasurer, the Dutchman, Carl Hirschman, doubled up as the secretariat, as indeed was the case for many other international sports institutions of the time. However, the 1929 financial crisis, on top of which, two years later, the devaluation of the British pound brought about radical changes: through poor investments Hirschman was ruined. He had not distinguished in his accounts between his personal wealth and the monies of FIFA, which, as a result, found itself in financial difficulties. The Dutch official’s ‘personal’ bankruptcy was the decisive event in the creation of a salaried post of general secretary, and Hirschman was asked to leave his post. Following a call for applications by the executive committee,¹⁵ Ivo Schricker, from Germany, was appointed to the position; for a time he had been one of the two FIFA vice-presidents. The appointment of this diligent official was to prove fundamental to the administrative development of the Federation. In parallel, and following the wishes of the German Felix Linne-
mann, the Austrian Hugo Meisl and the Italian Giovanni Mauro, the decision was taken to establish the headquarters of the institution in Zurich as opposed to Paris, the location supported by the French President of FIFA, Jules Rimet. The arguments put forward by these individuals in favour of Zurich are especially significant since they refer both to Switzerland’s central geographical position and to the advantages the country gains from its political neutrality.¹⁶ Basing the institution in Switzerland was to prove important in maintaining the permanence of FIFA’s structure, because of the country’s good means of communication, which allowed the secretary to interact with the member associations, as did its neutrality, which protected FIFA from the vicissitudes of the international context, as it did during the Second World War. Its exoneration from taxes, negotiated by FIFA, tends moreover to show there already existed on the part of the Swiss authorities a determination to help establish such organisations on its territory.

The transfer of the International Federation’s headquarters gave an early indication of the central position acquired by Switzerland in European football – FIFA in the period was still in majority composed of associations

from the old continent¹⁷ – and more generally in the sporting world since the International Olympic Committee had installed itself on the banks of Lake Geneva in Lausanne in 1915.¹⁸ Additionally, by increasing the number of matches it played, Swiss football administrators sought to make Switzerland a country central to the playing of the game.

From the 'Coupe des nations' to the Mitropa Cup

In 1930, the country hosted the 'Coupe des nations',¹⁹ a competition that took place at the time of the inauguration of the new facilities of the Servette de Genève club, le Stade des Charmilles, which also allowed the club's 40th anniversary to be celebrated.²⁰ The tournament provided an opportunity for the Hentsch family, famous merchant bankers, to show their support for the club by presenting the town with facilities that would thereafter allow it to host matches played by the national team.

The term 'Coupe des nations', ordinarily reserved for matches between national teams, is testimony to the organisers' search for grandeur and prestige. The tenor of the event was picked up by the French-language weekly *Le Sport Suisse*, which could not refrain from superlatives in its article of 25 June 1930: 'This event far outstrips anything we have previously seen in football in Switzerland, and the days from 28 June to 6 July will certainly have a world-wide impact'.²¹ At the same time, the German paper *Kicker* even called it 'Die Genfer Kleine Olympiade' [*Geneva's little Olympiad*],²² a comment that seems to bear witness to the European-wide impact of the event. As to the participants invited – clubs from the best leagues in Europe – it has to be admitted that the standard of competition was 'spicy'.²³ Moreover, regarding its European-ness, the tournament was exceptional in an era when competitions hardly ever surpassed the 'regional' level. Thus, even an event like the Mitropa Cup, which in the mid-1930s was spread over several months and invited up to 18 teams, remained limited to Central Europe, although it was covered by the sports press in countries not participating, such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Switzerland, involved in the Mitropa Cup in 1936 and 1937, with respectively four, then two club teams, had also taken part from 1927 onwards in the International Cup, an international competition for national teams from Italy, Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.²⁴ Over a two-year period, at least, the various teams met twice on a home and away basis in each tournament; it could be described as the European competition with the most at stake in the inter-war period, in terms of level of development of the game played in the different participating countries. From the start, the football committee of the ASFA, represented by its President, Jakob Schlegel, and another member, Jacques Bertschinger, took part in discussions to devise the competition, in meetings held in Venice in July 1927.²⁵

This participation by Switzerland in a ‘Central Europe of football’²⁶ may appear surprising from the point of view of results,²⁷ but it fits into a geopolitical stance that goes beyond football, ‘being overwhelmingly central European in its orientation, with a healthy regard for Italian patronage’.²⁸ Its participation, which was never called into question between the wars,²⁹ underlined the particular position the country occupied in Europe and the will of Switzerland’s leaders to knit close footballing links with other European nations. This stance was to prove particularly strong in the months to come, particularly when seen in the context of the increasing tensions across the continent of Europe.

1938–1944: staying neutral and playing football

From 1937 onwards, the Swiss government – in parallel to similar actions undertaken by the Scandinavian states – called into question its policy of ‘differential’ neutrality, moving to a policy called ‘integral’ neutrality, which was meant to ensure the security of the country in a geopolitical landscape that was becoming ever more troubled.³⁰ This change was guided by the Swiss desire to end their support for the economic sanctions decided by the League of Nations towards Italy after its invasion of Ethiopia. On the other hand, this return to greater political autonomy also took account of the international institution’s weaknesses since Germany and Japan had left it in 1935 and Italy was losing interest in it since giving up its membership on 11 December 1937.³¹ This realignment of the Swiss Confederation’s diplomacy, accepted by the Council of the League of Nations on 14 May 1938, allowed the country to reaffirm its ambition to position itself equidistantly between the two blocs that seemed to be emerging in the continent of Europe.

Swiss football and neutrality

Moments of international tension were useful for using football as a medium for updating the national ‘imaginary’, the nation’s collective cultural memory, and so newspaper commentaries around international matches tell us that political stakes were never far away from the touchline. Thus, at the World Cup qualifying match against Portugal played in Milan on 1 May 1938, the Swiss players opted out of the Fascist salute just before the game started and set off an ‘explosion of anger’³² among the Milanese spectators who went so far as to threaten the Swiss fans as they left the stadium. Similarly, the Swiss achievement against ‘Greater Germany’ in the first round of the World Cup on 4 and 9 June 1938 was angled in the media by the use of stereotypes of German physical and scientific play and of the Swiss being organised into their celebrated tactical defensive system called ‘le Verrou’ – meaning ‘deadlock’,³³ an allegorical transposition onto the football pitch of the ideology of the ‘national bastion’ or stronghold.³⁴

Swiss results were admittedly much better in the years 1936 to 1938, due to the tactics of manager Karl Rappan, from Austria, and to several talented players – some, like the striker ‘Xam’ Abbeglen, playing their club football abroad – as well as to experience acquired between 1933 and 1938 in the domestic professional league.³⁵ However, these results alone cannot explain the activism of Swiss football administrators on the international sports scene. Indeed, despite the increasingly tense circumstances and ever greater instrumentalisation of sport by political regimes, officials pursued sports traditions established in the 1920s and kept alive the ideal of sport as a vehicle for rapprochement between peoples, which encouraged them to support both a pacifist doctrine and a commitment to nationalism.³⁶

Switzerland and a new geopolitical balance of power, European football during the Second World War

Switzerland maintained its neutrality throughout the Second World War,³⁷ but unlike countries such as Belgium, Denmark, or the Netherlands it did not suffer invasion by Axis forces. The country’s neutrality was twofold: it was ‘defensive’ when neutrality led the government to devise a politico-military strategy of national withdrawal (*repli national*) within the Alpine *massif*, but it did not prevent it keeping one eye looking outwards, as recalled by the Head of the Political Department in November 1942:

... [firmness in the policy of neutrality] is forced upon us by our position, our national structure (economically and politically), our history, our mentality, our three races, our three languages, etc. That is axiomatic. But it is also incontrovertibly in the interests of the community of peoples, not least in Europe – though this is less directly visible. This community cannot go on forever tearing itself apart: there lies universal ruination. We can, without egotism, without ulterior motives, without hurting anyone, be useful to everybody, according to circumstances, and maintain a minimum of international relations, which, after all, everyone needs.³⁸

In this ‘minimum’ of international relations, the national football team played an unusual role, since from 1940 to 1943 it took part in over a dozen matches across Europe, despite the geopolitical transformations brought about by the German armies’ successive invasions. In fact, just behind Nazi Germany, which used football as a means of promoting its power on the continent,³⁹ Switzerland was the country that played the most matches during this period. One only has to read the newspapers of the time to see the different meanings conferred on these matches: they confirm Paul Dietschy’s analysis, which has revealed wide variation: ‘From symbolic confrontations between peoples, through revenge for years of occupation, to bringing peoples back together, a wide range of feelings and interpretations could be called upon’.⁴⁰

First of all, the matches were opportunities to celebrate sporting traditions that, in many cases, had been damaged in the conflict. Thus, in May 1943, the match between Switzerland and Hungary gave a journalist, Emile Grêt of *Le Sport Suisse*, the opportunity to bemoan how rare international matches had become and to express his delight at the forthcoming game:

[T]he event [] next Sunday, will attract sports fans from the whole of Switzerland to the Parc des Sports des Charmilles [...]. For us, Hungary, although not one of our oldest adversaries, is none the less – with France, Germany and Italy – one the nations with whom we have had the most continuing international contacts.⁴¹

Whereas these matches were treated as a sign of a return to the normality – albeit for only the 90 minutes of a game of football – that had prevailed before the war, they also allowed contacts to be maintained with countries bloodied by the conflict. This stance could be found especially in matches against different French national teams.⁴² During the war, playing against France was an act of diplomacy, as confirmed in a letter to the Federal Council from the head of the Swiss delegation present in Lyon on 16 November 1941 for a match against ‘la France Libre’,⁴³ i.e. a match played by the Swiss B team in the unoccupied zone and not against a team representing the ‘Free French’. In this letter the delegate mentioned that the ‘Swiss players and officials have returned home touched by all the signs of gratitude showered upon them and they understand better than in the past the humanitarian task that is their homeland’s duty to take on in these difficult times that the world is going through’.⁴⁴

Additionally, the Swiss press talked about ‘a symbolic match [...], the first football match on a French pitch involving a French national team, although selected solely from the Unoccupied Zone [Vichy France], against a foreign national team’.⁴⁵ Regarding a match in Marseille in March 1942, between the two national A teams, a journalist highlighted the fact that the local population had come in such numbers to show ‘their feelings towards Helvetia as their benefactress’.⁴⁶ Then, a few weeks later, for the return match between the Swiss B team and the French team representing ‘la France Libre’ played on 27 May 1942 in Lausanne, the same newspaper presented the event’s significance from the diplomatic angle:

In normal times an international match takes on great importance, especially from the sporting point of view. In current circumstances, it has even greater importance since it provides an opportunity for citizens of friendly countries to meet, despite the many difficulties, to fraternise, to talk about the past and to sketch out future projects. It is a welcome reunion, and one made for expressing the warm feelings shared by two peoples.⁴⁷

However, it was difficult to keep on playing matches against some of Switzerland’s historic opponents, such as Italy for example, who had not played since 1941. Nor was it easy to organise matches against more distant

non-belligerents such as Sweden or Portugal, because of the difficulties of travel abroad. That being the case, in order to continue playing, the Swiss team was forced to find new opponents, who emerged through the geopolitical reconfiguration of Europe. So, the Swiss played three matches against the national side of Croatia, a Nazi Germany satellite state created after the invasion of Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ These matches may have had a sporting justification, but they also carried a very important, hidden political dimension, since in those times of uncertainty the aim was to make contacts with this country, as an ally of Germany, a belligerent that looked as though it was emerging victorious from the war. However, unlike 'classic' encounters against neighbours – Germany, France, Italy, even Hungary⁴⁹ – comments on these matches recalled the difficulties of the geopolitical context and they were reported through nostalgic spectacles. So, whereas the match of 21 April 1940 was reported in *Le Sport Suisse* as a proper international match, it was not described favourably; the journalist Emile Birnbaum – one of the most admired sporting wordsmiths of his day – lost his temper.⁵⁰

It was almost a sin to sacrifice my Sunday afternoon for a football match [...]. However, in Switzerland there are always some 15,000 fellows – like us – who feel lost if there is a match on and they don't go. [...]. [There are no more] matches against Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway and Denmark, little Tom Thumbs gobbled up raw by the ogre. But now there are these new-born countries, the offspring of fear and confusion: Slovakia, Croatia and goodness knows who coming along behind – Bessarabia, Ukraine⁵¹

As month followed month, the political ambiguity of opponents became more problematic. Thus, when the destiny of the war began to change direction, the Swiss government intervened with the ASFA and got its officials, after one final Swiss–Croatia game played in the early months of 1943, to agree 'there [would] be no return match in Croatia'.⁵²

In 1944, with the situation in Europe turning delicate, the national side, *la Nati*, played not a single international game in the calendar year – an extremely rare event in its history. The Allied offensives were succeeding in limiting opportunities to travel on the continent. Europe was to emerge from the war a year later, but it was battered and bloodied and many football administrators put on record their deep resentment towards the Germans, whom they considered responsible for the war and whose armies and militia, they believed, had committed awful atrocities.

1945–1955: becoming a major actor on the changing European stage

In the months following the end of the conflict in Europe, discussions were held inside the Swiss government about the international standing of the

country.⁵³ Unlike the decisions made in the early 1920s, the country decided not to take part in projects that might be too political in character and thus preferred to stay in the background regarding the creation of the United Nations Organisation. Similarly, Switzerland was hardly concerned in discussions within the European movement⁵⁴ and did not join the Council of Europe, set up in 1949, until 1963. The Swiss Confederation was concentrating therefore on maintaining a strong neutrality, i.e. getting involved only in projects that could not weaken its position and which, on the other hand, were bound to strengthen its position as a mediator on the international stage.⁵⁵ Geneva kept its position as an international centre of diplomacy,⁵⁶ de facto, by providing homes for part of the UN administration and then, at the beginning of the 1950s for the European Centre for Culture and CERN (the European Centre for Nuclear Research).

Swiss football's administrators, in their activities at the European level, again took their lead from the Swiss Confederation's political stance. The national team, indeed, played 16 matches from 1945 to 1947, more than its neighbours who played a dozen at the very most. The relief of being able to put the agonies of war behind them and the joy of meeting old adversaries again gave a particular savour to the matches against France, Italy and Austria in early 1946. In the same vein, Swiss officials were to play an unusual role vis-à-vis Germany.

Reconciliation and the normalisation of international relations

In 1945, from the 'political' point of view, Germany no longer existed; it was divided into four military zones, administered by the war victors, France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States. Acknowledging the disappearance of German football's national governing body (*Deutscher Fußball Bund*), the FIFA congress of 1946 decided to follow the recommendation of its executive committee and, following their own rules, excluded Germany from the International Federation. Indeed, Article 6 of FIFA's statutes forbade matches with national football associations that were not affiliated members.⁵⁷ Yet, discussions became very emotional, with arguments citing Article 2 of the statutes, recalling the requirement to maintain friendly relations between members⁵⁸ – which seemed no longer possible with the Germans. The position of Germany appeared nonetheless unusual since sporting friendships prevailed with other countries where fascist regimes had held sway, such as Austria, Italy and Norway. Their federations were quickly reintegrated into FIFA⁵⁹ and they were able to play matches again.

All the same, the complete exclusion of Germany did not command unanimous support and, in particular, was not supported by Switzerland. Several representatives wished to encourage the resumption of sporting relations with their German counterparts, citing the long tradition of football

between the two countries. In addition, they thought football should not be guided by political considerations, but instead should be used to bring peoples together. Indeed, football, as a major sport in Germany, quickly regained its rightful place in the country, despite the difficult living conditions. Already in 1946, British soldiers of the 53rd Division stationed on the Rhine had played a few games against German XIs, sometimes in front of crowds of several thousand.⁶⁰ In summer 1947, within FIFA, Schriccker was able to inform his vice-president, Seeldrayers, that matches had even taken place between Swiss and German border towns, even though this flouted the International Federation's ban. FIFA nonetheless stood firm on the issue and in September 1947 the executive committee reminded anyone willing to listen that matches against German clubs were not tolerated any more than the transfer of German players was.⁶¹ Strong resentment towards Germany was obviously still held by some members of FIFA's executive committee, and especially by the Belgian Seeldrayers.⁶²

As month followed month, the ASFA came under pressure from some of its regional associations who wanted to start playing against their German neighbours again, or at least against teams located along the border where there was a tradition of such games, as there was at international level. In addition, on 28 July 1948, the ASFA received a formal request from the American military government of the Baden-Württemberg region to organise matches between German and Swiss teams, since these encounters, according to American authorities, would be beneficial 'to train and reorient German youth and sports officials'.⁶³ This request was an acknowledgement of the Swiss desire to resume matches with Germany and also testimony to the reputation built up by Switzerland on the European footballing scene.⁶⁴

Even though the ASFA filed a formal request with FIFA for clubs to be able to play the desired matches, even if they were to be 'charity matches', the 1948 congress in London reiterated the ban on Germany, despite Jules Rimet's affirmations about the spiritual union that must bind football associations together. A few weeks later, however, the International Federation did begin to cede ground – by giving exceptional permission to the sports directorate in the French Occupation Zone to organise friendly matches between French and German teams.⁶⁵

Swiss football administrators, notably, Gustav Wiederkehr,⁶⁶ were not slow to use this breach in FIFA's defences. Trying to force the issue, they organised three matches for October 1948 between German and Swiss towns: Stuttgart vs. Zürich, Karlsruhe vs. Basel and Munich vs. Saint Gallen. These 'charity' matches – a status, as Heather Dichter has pointed out, that did not prevent Swiss football officials looking to make a profit⁶⁷ – demonstrate that the aim was not only to update the state of sporting relations between the two countries, but also to make a political signal in favour of Germany's

reappearance on the international stage. As a consequence, a meeting took place on 20 September 1948 between general secretary Schricker and the president of the Swiss Football Association, Ernst Thommen. This led to the games being denounced by FIFA and the ASFA.⁶⁸ However, the matches did take place, and the Swiss association was forced to impose a heavy fine (500 Swiss francs) on the organisers while strong feelings 'against' the matches were still being shown, especially in countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.⁶⁹

This decision meant the ASFA had to face a lot of reaction from inside their own country and even an internal revolt. Ernst Thommen feared the ban on matches might have deleterious impact on the Swiss football association's authority⁷⁰ and the revolt caused part of the Swiss public to react against the differences in treatment by FIFA of towns in the American zone in contrast to those in the French zone, notably in the Saar,⁷¹ where similar matches were organised between German and French towns.⁷² The Zürich paper *Sport* instigated a call for donations by the public to pay the clubs' fine, and the sum was raised within days. Keeping the pressure on and taking advantage of the emergence of a new state, Swiss officials – with others – succeeded in getting Germany readmitted to FIFA in the early 1950s. Symbolically, Switzerland moreover was the first team to play against the national team of the new Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), on 22 November 1950 in Stuttgart.

The resentments left over from the Second World War faded, only to be replaced by a new antagonism between Europeans, namely the East–West divide. In 1948, with the 'Prague coup' (the communist takeover in Czechoslovakia) and the start of the Berlin Blockade, the break between the two sides appeared complete. Football was no exception in this context as very few matches were organised between 1949 and 1954 during this first stage of tensions in the Cold War. A change in Soviet diplomacy resulting from the death of Stalin, allowed the first rapprochement between East and West,⁷³ which had furthermore been anticipated by Swiss leaders as the Swiss national team was the first team to resume matches against a team from the East, Hungary as it turned out, in the second half of 1952. In addition, Swiss officials were sometimes called upon to act as mediators between the two sides, as was the case for Ernst Thommen when the FIFA Executive Committee gave him the task of settling a dispute between Spain and Hungary over a player, Lazlo Kubala.⁷⁴ The administrator from Basel went on to play an active role in setting up a continent-wide football organisation, established in June 1954, which was unique in the emerging post-war European settlement, since it included member countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain.⁷⁵

Ernst Thommen and the creation of UEFA

The authors of the commemorative books on UEFA highlight the work of Ottorino Barassi, José Crahay and Henri Delaunay in setting up the organisation. While these people were central and, from Spring 1952, were members of the standing committee whose initial aim was to achieve a synthesis of the proposals from several associations on the reorganisation that was taking place at that time within FIFA,⁷⁶ other European stakeholders became involved in the project, such as the Englishman Sir Stanley Rous and Switzerland's Ernst Thommen. In the 1963 edition of the UEFA handbook, José Crahay mentions the contribution of Thommen in bringing together the European Associations and notes that, alongside Barassi, Delaunay, Meert and Rous, he 'provided input during [the meeting of European Associations in Zurich in May 1952] and [his] experience regarding the establishment of the future European organisation'.⁷⁷

Chairman of the ASFA from 1947 to 1954, Ernst Thommen had been a central figure in Swiss football since the 1930s⁷⁸ until his accidental death in 1967. He was also involved in sports management more generally as he was head of Sport Toto, the company running sports betting in Switzerland. As Heidrun Homburg noted, he had a strong interest in international football⁷⁹ and as such was indispensable within FIFA in the early 1950s.

Alongside Barassi and Rous, he was part of the new FIFA elite replacing the Rimet–Seeldrayers–Mauro triumvirate. From this position, Thommen was to prove very active in the restructuring phase that the Federation underwent and 'imposed' Kurt Gassmann, a former secretary of the ASFA, as Ivo Schriccker's replacement when the latter retired at the end of 1950,⁸⁰ despite the hundred or so other applications for the post. He even managed to repeat the trick by proposing Hans Bangerter as deputy secretary, and then in harness with Gassmann, made every effort to find FIFA a new headquarters, which were finally officially opened in 1955, overlooking Zürich.

Like his British and Italian counterparts, Thommen recognised the need to revise, or rather adapt the structure of FIFA to new developments happening in football across the world and also to the new political configuration emerging with the start of decolonisation and its corollary, namely the increasing dilution of the relative weight of European countries in the International Federation's constituent bodies. With this in mind, on several occasions, he raised the issue of the creation of a European-wide body. For example, in March 1952 at a meeting of the executive committee, he noted that 'the draft Statutes did not adequately safeguard the legitimate interests of European football associations and called for their interests to be taken into account'.⁸¹ A few months later, at a meeting in Paris that brought together several European associations,⁸² he sent a note to the Assembly both to give his apologies for absence and to assert his support for the idea of forming a union of European

federations, since the idea seemed ‘worthy of recommendation to protect both the individual interests of each association belonging to the European sphere – and their interests in common’,⁸³ even though he added that the authority of FIFA must be respected. Finally, at the Extraordinary Congress of 1953, which saw a complete overhaul of the organisation’s statutes, Thommen played a fundamental role in closing the gap between the ideas of the South Americans and the Europeans, by proposing a compromise in the Assembly on the composition of the executive committee – a separate allocation of seats for European members – which was ratified by Congress.

Reflecting the importance of the Swiss administrator in the creation of a European Confederation, its founding Congress, originally scheduled to be held in Bern⁸⁴ on the coat-tails of the World Cup finals that were being hosted by Switzerland⁸⁵ (yet another testimony to the country’s role in international football), was actually held in Thommen’s home city of Basel. That is why he opened the discussions by stating that he would like the Assembly to set ‘an example of a united Europe’,⁸⁶ a phrase capturing the sense of the footballing ventures of Swiss leaders since the inter-war years. The creation and development of UEFA as a key institution in the structuring of European football⁸⁷ demonstrated once again the strong commitment of top Swiss administrators. This was confirmed by the appointment in the late 1950s of Hans Bangerter as general secretary of UEFA replacing Pierre Delaunay, and then by the transfer of its headquarters from Paris to Bern. Finally, in 1961, the new president of the UEFA, was no other than the Swiss Gustav Wiederkehr, succeeding the Dane Ebbe Schwartz as a mark of continuity, since a representative of one ‘small’ footballing country, also neutral on the international stage, was replaced by another, a sign that in a Union whose composition is at the very least atypical, these countries are well placed to facilitate communication and exchange.

Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to how top officials of Swiss football made their country’s international dimension a major aim of their actions. Thanks to them, Swiss football exists on the international stage, over and above its sometimes uneven results on the sports field, and has left its mark on the transformation of European football.

Additionally, our analyses highlight the complexity of different political and geopolitical configurations, and provide evidence of successive convergences or divergences that can exist between the interests of sports administrative bodies and those of political authorities. This finding requires further, finer-grained analysis of the relationship between sport and international politics. As such, it would mean focusing more on the actions and motivations of the main sporting actors in the period of study, in order to identify the

degree of autonomy that sport maintains vis-à-vis the state. Such an approach would eventually provide a better understanding of the whys and conditions of possibility of certain achievements.

Finally, in terms of Swiss historiography, the domain of football has provided further evidence of the ambiguity of Swiss neutrality on the international stage. Indeed, whereas the actions of the top officials in its footballing institutions seemed to embody the outward-looking character of Switzerland's cultural diplomacy, they remained nonetheless under government supervision,⁸⁸ and government reactions could vary in firmness depending on the urgency of the context of international tensions. It should be added that the position adopted in this paper resonates with the approach outlined by the Swiss historian Hans Ulrich Jost. In a programmatic article published in 1998, he suggested that writing the history of Switzerland required going beyond the national framework because not doing so entails a 'loss of methodological and epistemological perspective [and also tends to blur] both the complexity of the social dimension as well as supranational interdependencies'.⁸⁹ In this context, football as a transnational object undoubtedly has a role to play.

Notes

1. Albrecht Sonntag, *Les identités du football européen* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2008). For a discussion of the concept see Gérard Bossuat, 'Des identités européennes', in *Pour l'histoire des relations internationales*, ed. Robert Frank (Paris: PUF, 2012): 663–86.
2. Jürgen Mittag and Benjamin Legrand, 'Towards a Europeanization of football? Historical Phases in the Evolution of the UEFA Football Championship', *Soccer and Society*, 11, no. 6 (2010): 709–22; Arne Niemann, Borja Garcia and Wyn Grant, *The Transformation of European Football. Towards the Europeanization of the National Game* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).
3. Stephen Wagg and David Andrews, *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2007); Benoît Macon, 'The Politicization of Football: The European Game and the Approach to the Second World War', *Soccer and Society* 9, no. 4 (2008), 532–50.
4. Thierry Terret, *Histoire et géopolitique du sport* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011), 245–308; Robert Frank, 'Internationalisation du sport et diplomatie sportive', in *Pour l'histoire des relations internationales* (Paris: PUF, 2012): 386–405.
5. Heidrun Homburg, 'Financing World Football. A Business History of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)', *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte* 53, no. 1 (2008): 33–69.
6. Pauline Milani, *Le diplomate et l'artiste: construction d'une politique culturelle suisse à l'étranger (1938–1985)* (Neuchâtel: Éditions Alphil, 2013).
7. Bruno Strasser and Frédéric Joye, 'Une science "neutre" dans la Guerre froide?: la Suisse et la coopération scientifique européenne (1951–1969)', *Revue Suisse d'Histoire* 55, no. 1 (2005): 95–112.
8. Pierre Lanfranchi, 'Football et modernité. La Suisse et la pénétration du football sur le continent', *Traverse* 15, no. 3 (1998): 76–87.

9. Christian Koller, 'Football Negotiating the Placement of Switzerland within Europe', *Soccer and Society* 11, no. 6 (2010): 748–60.
10. Grégory Quin, 'La Suisse face à la grande Allemagne. Eléments pour une histoire du football helvétique (1933–1942)', in *Sports et médias: du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Michaël Attali (Biarritz: Atlantica, 2010), 761–70; Heather Dichter, 'Kicking around international sport: West Germany's return to the International community through football', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 17 (2013): 2031–51.
11. Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young, 'Towards a New History of European Sport', *European Review* 19, no. 4 (2011): 487–501.
12. Christian Koller, 'Associations de football concurrentes pendant la première moitié du XX^e siècle', in *Le football en Suisse. Enjeux sociaux et symboliques d'un spectacle universel*, ed. Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David and Fabien Ohl (Neuchâtel: CIES, 2009): 31–46.
13. Since international sporting links with Germany were banned, this match stands out in the football match landscape of the time. See Christian Koller, 'Das Boykottspiel: Schweiz-Deutschland 4:1 (27.6.1920)', in Christian Koller, *Sterndstunden des Schweizer Fussballs* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2008): 77–88.
14. Hans Ulrich Jost, 'Menace et repliement (1914–1945)', in *Nouvelle Histoire de la Suisse et des Suisses* (Lausanne: Payot, 2004): 687.
15. Anon. (1931) 'Communiqués officiels – Secrétariat', *World Football* [Bulletin officiel de la FIFA], no. 28, 35.
16. FIFA Congress, Minutes of the 21st Congress, 1932: 9.
17. Paul Dietschy, 'Making Football Global? FIFA, Europe, and the non-European Football World, 1912–74', *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013): 279–98.
18. Pierre-Alain Hug, 'De l'utopie au pragmatisme: l'installation du CIO à Lausanne (1906–1927)', in *Sports en formes, acteurs, contextes et dynamiques d'institutionnalisation*, ed. Christophe Jaccoud and Thomas Busset (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2001): 95–126.
19. Alfredo Pogge, 'Das "tournoi international de Football" 1930 in Geneva', *Liberio* 3, no. 37 (2002).
20. Jacques Ducret, *Le livre d'or du football suisse* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1994): 13.
21. *Le Sport Suisse*, 25 June 1930.
22. *Kicker*, 8 July 1930.
23. SPVGG Fürth (Germany), First Vienna (Austria), C.S. Brugge (Belgium), Real Irun (Spain), Sète (France), Bologna (Italy), Ujpest Budapest (Hungary), Go Ahead Devanter (Netherlands), Slavia Prague (Czechoslovakia).
24. Grégory Quin, 'La Coupe de l'Europe Centrale (1927–1938), une compétition internationale oubliée?', *Stadion. Revue Internationale d'Histoire du Sport* 37, no. 2 (2013): 285–304.
25. Archives of the Swiss Football Association [Association Suisse de Football – ASFA], Annual Reports, Report for season 1927–1928: 71.
26. Matthias Marschick, 'MITROPA: representation of "Central Europe" in football', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 36, no. 7 (2001): 7–23.
27. The Swiss team won four matches out of 32 played between 1927 and the end of the competition in the spring of 1938 following Germany's annexation of Austria. More generally, between 1927 and 1944, the *Nati* registered 29 victories and 68 defeats in 114 matches, whereas Italy totted up 64 victories for 12 defeats out of 97 matches.

28. Neville Wylie, 'Pilet-Golaz and the making of Swiss foreign policy: some remarks', *Revue Suisse d'Histoire* 47, no. 4 (1997): 611.
29. It should be remembered all the same that the Swiss clubs withdrew from the Mitropa Cup in 1937, after only two years participation, citing their poor results.
30. This change was recognised, moreover, by Germany and Italy and, as much to reassure the population as to get into the minds of the residents, this recognition was publicised 'life-size' in the National Exhibition of 1939. Swiss Federal Archives (AFS [*Archives fédérales suisses*]), Documents on neutrality (1939–1941), Letter from the Swiss Legation in Italy to the Department of Foreign Affairs, 2 April 1941.
31. Swiss Federal Archives (AFS), Documents on neutrality (1937–1940), Conclusions of the report adopted by the Consolidated Commission [*Commission renforcée*] of Foreign Affairs and the Constitution, 25 May 1938.
32. *L'Impartial*, 9 May 1938.
33. Grégory Quin, 'Football et "imaginaire national" helvétique (1920–1942). Les matchs Suisse-Allemagne au cours de l'entre-deux guerres vus par la presse romande', *Revue Historique Vaudoise* 116 (2008): 149–60.
34. Walter Schaufelberger, "'Das Réduit national" 1940, ein militärhistorischer Sonderfall', in *La Suisse imaginée. Bricolages d'une identité nationale*, ed. Guy P. Marchal and A. Mattioli (Zurich: Chronos, 1992), 207–16.
35. Philippe Vonnard and Grégory Quin, 'Élément pour une histoire de la mise en place du professionnalisme dans le football suisse: processus, résistances et ambiguïtés', *Revue suisse d'histoire* 62, no. 1 (2012): 70–85.
36. Patrick Clastres, 'Culture de paix et culture de guerre. Pierre de Coubertin et le Comité International olympique de 1910 à 1920', *Guerres mondiales et conflit contemporain* 251, no. 3 (2013): 95–114.
37. Because of Swiss actions during the war, particularly in the economic domain, this neutrality has been questioned by a number of historians. See, especially, issue 144 of the journal *Relations internationales*. Furthermore, in these difficult times, the population had to stick together. Under this heading, neutrality could be used by the government as a means of avoiding civil unrest. See Hadrien Buclin, "'Défense nationale" ou "défense de classe"? Retour sur le procès de treize antimilitaristes suisses en 1942'. *Cahiers d'histoire du mouvement ouvrier* 30 (2014): 51–68.
38. AFS, Documents of the Federal Council, Letter from the Head of the Political Department to the Swiss Minister in Budapest, 11 November 1942.
39. Nils Havemann, *Fußball unterm Hakenkreuz: der DFB zwischen sport, politik und kommerz* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005).
40. Paul Dietschy, 'Football et Guerre totale: le cas de la Seconde Guerre mondiale', in *Le football dans nos sociétés. Une culture populaire. 1914–1998*, ed. Yvan Gastaut and Stéphane Mourlane (Paris: Autrement, 2006): 173.
41. *Le Sport Suisse*, 12 May 1943.
42. During this period, matches were played by different 'French national' teams, which either represented the country as a whole ('équipe de France A') or the Vichy regime ('équipe de la France Libre' or 'équipe de France de la zone non occupée' – the France of the Unoccupied Zone).
43. *Gazette de Lausanne*, 17 November 1941.
44. AFS, Documents of the Federal Council, Letter from the delegate of the Swiss Football Association to the Political Department of the Federal Council, 18 November 1941.

45. *Gazette de Lausanne*, le 17 November 1941.
46. *Gazette de Lausanne*, 7 March 1942. Helvetia is the female national personification of Switzerland, derived from the Latin name for the Gauls inhabiting the area in Roman times.
47. *Gazette de Lausanne*, 25 May 1942.
48. Branka Magas, *Croatia through History. The Making of a European State* (London: Saqi, 2007),
49. *Le Sport Suisse*, 12 May 1943.
50. Following an article on the Switzerland-Germany match of 20 April 1941 by Birnbaum, which was judged too 'patriotic', *Le Sport Suisse* was suspended by the government for several months, as testimony to the idea that in moments of tension the actions of sportsmen were kept under close surveillance. See Karim Di Matteo, 'Les débuts de la presse sportive suisse, son implication sociale, politique et économique pour le sport: l'exemple du *Sport Suisse* (1905–1947)' (Masters dissertation, Lausanne University, 2001).
51. *Le Sport Suisse*, 21 April 1940.
52. AFS, Federal Council, Minutes of the session of the Federal Council on 16 March 1943.
53. A 25-page presentation on neutrality was made by the Political Department of Foreign Affairs Commission of the two parliamentary Chambers (the States' Council [*Conseil des Etats*] and the National Council [*Conseil national*]) in November 1948. Similarly a study group on neutrality was set up with the aim of 'reaching a number of conclusions on the subject'. Swiss Federal Archives (AFS), Documents on neutrality (1945–1957), Study Group on neutrality chaired by M. Boerlin, member of the National Council. Report on the session of 4 December 1948.
54. Which does not mean that no Swiss representatives took part, since Denis de Rougemont was particularly active in discussions on the subject of culture.
55. Kreis Georg, 'Die Neutralität – eine historische Kategorie für eine künftige Politik?', in *Die Schweizer Neutralität. Beibehalten, umgestalten oder doch abschaffen?* (Zürich: Werd, 2007): 35–50.
56. Antoine Fleury, 'Genève: lieu de mémoire d'une Europe rêvée et de l'Europe des réalités', in *Penser l'Europe: quarante ans d'études européennes à Genève*, ed. Stella Ghervas and Silvio Guindani (Geneva: Université de Genève, 2003): 89–96.
57. FIFA, Statutes and Regulations, June 1938: 4.
58. FIFA, Statutes and Regulations, June 1938: 3.
59. FIFA, Executive Committee, Minutes of sessions of 10, 11 and 12 November 1945.
60. The National Archives [London], FO 371/55626. Correspondence concerning meetings between Britain and Germany 1945–1946, Letter from Stanley Rous to Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery, 8 December 1945.
61. ASFA, Documents on re-entry of Germany into FIFA, Letter from Schricker to Käser, 15 September 1947.
62. As is confirmed by several letters in his personal correspondence file held in the FIFA Documentation Centre in Zürich. For FIFA's position on the German question, see Henry Wahlig, *Ein Tor zur Welt* (Verlag die Werksatt: Göttingen, 2010).
63. ASFA, Documents on re-entry of Germany into FIFA, Letter from the British military government of the region of Baden-Württemberg to the President of ASFA Ernst Thommen, 28 July 1948. (Freely translated from the German.)

64. This request was all the more significant as the American zone did not have a common border with Switzerland.
65. FIFA, Correspondence of Jules Rimet, Letter from Schricker to Rimet, 21 September 1948.
66. Wiederkehr was President of UEFA from 1961 to 1972.
67. Heather Dichter, 'Kicking around International Sport: West Germany's Return to the International Community through Football', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 17 (2013): 2031–51.
68. FIFA, Seeldrayers Correspondence, Letter from Schricker to Seeldrayers, 20 November 1948.
69. Letters were sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs by Swiss diplomatic representatives in Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia mentioning several newspaper articles appearing in those countries denouncing the actions taken by the Swiss football authorities.
70. The Swiss official had indicated to Schricker that if a ban was ordered, there was a risk it would pose problems for the ASFA, in particular the risk of losing members to other sports organisations which already tolerated matches with German clubs. ASFA, Documents on re-entry of Germany into FIFA, Telegram from Thommen to Rimet, 6 October 1948.
71. On the case of the Saar, see Pierre Lanfranchi, 'Le football sarrois de 1947 à 1952, un contre-pied aux actions diplomatique', *Vingtième siècle*, 26 (1990): 59–66.
72. ASFA, Documents on re-entry of Germany into FIFA, Presentation of the differences of opinion between FIFA and ASFA regarding matches against teams from Germany, 12 November 1948.
73. Marie-Pierre Rey, 'Diplomatisme et totalitarisme: le cas soviétique', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 65–66 (2002): 61–4.
74. Kubala had fled his country of origin and, despite a ban by the Hungarian Federation, was playing for FC Barcelona.
75. On East-West co-operation during the Cold War, see Antoine Fleury, Lubor Jilek, *Une Europe malgré tout, 1945–1990* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008); Jean-François Sirinelli, Georges-Henri Soutou, *Culture et guerre froide* (Paris: PUPS, 2008).
76. FIFA, Reorganisation 1950–1953, Bericht über die Tagung der Europäischen FIFA – Verband in Paris, 22 Rue de Londres, 27 June 1952.
77. José Crahay, 'Des origines de l'UEFA', in *UEFA Handbook. 1963/1964*, UEFA: Berne, 1963.
78. In the second half of the 1930s, he devised a plan called the 'Thommen Plan', to reorganise regional football.
79. Heidrun Homburg, 'Ernst Thommen, die Schweiz und der Weltfußball, 1946–1962', *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 107 (2007): 69–102.
80. FIFA, Delegation of the Executive Committee, Minutes of the Session of 2 December 1950.
81. FIFA, Executive Committee, Minutes of the Sessions of 9 and 10 March 1952.
82. Countries taking part in the meeting in June 1952 in Paris (in alphabetical order): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Saarland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.
83. FIFA, Institutional Reorganisation (1950–1953), Report on the session of 27 June 1952.
84. Archives of East Germany [GDR], Documents concerning the 'Deutscher Turn und Sportbund' [*German Gymnastics and Sports Association*], Collaboration

with FIFA, Minutes of the Assembly of the Group of European Football Associations of 12 April 1954.

85. The 1954 World Cup was the first time the competition had been held in Europe since 1938.
86. UEFA Archives, General Assemblies, Minutes of the Assembly of 15 June 1954.
87. Manuel Schotté, 'La structuration du football professionnel européen. Les fondements sociaux de la "spécificité sportive"', *Revue Française de Socio-Economie* 13, no. 1 (2014): 85–106.
88. Similar conclusions were drawn on the position taken on football by the British Foreign Office in the 1930s. See Richard Holt and Tony Mason, 'Le football, le fascisme et la politique étrangère britannique: L'Angleterre, l'Italie et l'Allemagne, 1934–1935' in *Sports et relations internationales*, ed. Alfred Wahl (Metz: Université de Metz, 1994), 73–95.
89. Hans-Ulrich Jost, 'Pour une histoire européenne de la Suisse', *Traverse* 1, no. 3 (1994): 35.