

## 14.07.2016 Football

### Will the Euros bring the magic back to Europe?

The France-Portugal final was indecisive until a goal late in extra time brought victory to Cristiano Ronaldo's team-mates. A final act that was too close to call, the two teams being so hard to separate. But beyond the sporting prizes, a sense of renewal for Europe enveloped this 2016 tournament.

Firstly there was the competition between the supporters, carried off by the smallest nations, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Iceland. Their joyful fiestas did not just impress, but also marginalised, and finally overcame, the aggression and violent assaults that others sought to normalise. Their infectious enthusiasm even won over supporters of the larger teams who, in their biggest games against France, Germany or Portugal, were supported to the sound of chants exuberantly popularised by a tiny nation like Iceland.

It was an emotional affair for us Corsicans as well, an island of 310,000 residents, to see Iceland, with its population of 330,000, stand head and shoulders above the England team and condemn the star players from the most wealthy league in Europe to a particularly symbolic "exit" the day after Brexit!

And what can we say of the 10% of the Icelandic population that travelled to support their team, flying the flag and beating out their rhythmic chant against France, but that it reminded us of the tens of thousands of Corsicans who travelled to the Stade de France a year ago to support Bastia in the final of Coupe de France against Paris Saint Germain. They brought the proof that matters to us: even with a population of just 300,000 you can reach the peak of a European competition!

It was Ireland that brought us the first waves of good humour which cheerfully supplanted the systematic aggression of other fan groups, like the Russians. However, the "scuffles between supporters" got far more coverage in the media, which were looking for drama! But the good humour of the Irish was so infectious, and was picked up first by the Icelanders and then by the Welsh who were as magnificent in the stands as they were on the pitch.

Wales reached the semi-final of the Euros! A stateless nation in the last four! A magnificent symbolic achievement for which EFA is still congratulating our MEP Jill Evans and our friends in Plaid Cymru. Because what was shown, both in the stands by all the "little countries", and on the pitch by Iceland and still more by Wales, is that a people coming together, this mixture of self-confidence, of joy in togetherness and collective desire to succeed can bring results every bit as good as those achieved by just assembling eleven of the best-paid champions from the various leagues of Europe.

A collective sport like football has a physical dimension and a technical dimension which gives the large nations a statistical advantage. But there is also a psychological dimension, a particular enthusiasm, which comes spontaneously to the fore among the small nations solidly backed by a crowd mobilised by their eleven national heroes.

Euro 2016 was an event that we enjoyed because by changing its qualification rules, it opened the door to several small countries. They have shown that not only do they all deserve their place, but that they are capable, on the terraces as on the pitch, of bringing the magic back to football and even to Europe!

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