



Keeping the faith...North Cyprus believe they are good enough to be a top 100 FIFA nation after winning the inaugural ELF Cup

# North Cyprus in good ELF

NORTH CYPRUS want to play games against some of FIFA's weaker members, believing they can more than hold their own, after comfortably winning the inaugural ELF Cup. "We should play San Marino, Malta or Luxembourg," said captain Huseyin Amcaoglu after the tournament, which is primarily designed for non-FIFA-affiliated sides. "I feel we would be in the top 100 of FIFA members."

North Cyprus, who hosted the event, beat Crimea 3-1 in the Final having easily won all three group games – against Crimea, Tajikistan and Tibet – then thrashing Zanzibar 5-0 in the semi-finals.

Hamis Cakir, Hasan Sapsizoglu and Ertac Tackiran put the home side 3-0 ahead in the decider, with Abylatifov Marlen scoring a late consolation for Crimea.

It was North Cyprus' third trophy in a year having lifted the Peace Cup, also on home soil, and the Wild Cup in Hamburg.

The government of Northern Cyprus backed the ELF Cup, putting up half the £135,000 staging costs, to highlight what it sees as the iniquity of the sporting embargo on the country, which is recognised as an independent state only by Turkey.

Eight teams competed in the tournament – the name of which stands for equality, liberty and

fraternity – but the line-up had to be changed after withdrawals because of fears of FIFA censure. FIFA member Afghanistan pulled out after being told not to play by the world governing body, and Turkey's amateur side also opted out. Teams representing Gagauzia, an autonomous region of Moldova, and Crimea were brought in as late replacements.

## Modified squads

Two other FIFA members, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, did play but modified their squads, again because of fears of repercussions from the world body. Kyrgyzstan fielded former national team keeper Hamrakulov Shakir, but the rest of the 14-man squad were all drawn from the futsal ranks; Tajikistan fielded futsal internationals and players from top club sides Vakhsh and Khima.

Zanzibar used their Under-20 side because the senior team were preparing for the CECAFA Cup, the annual event for East and Central African countries. That is the only competitive international outing for the island, which is an associate of the Confederation of African Football but remains shunned by FIFA.

Greenland brought a full-strength side that included Pelle Mortensen, a reserve forward with

Danish top division OB Odense, and new captain Niklas Kreutzmann, a semi-professional with Danish second level side Aarhus Fremad.

Kyrgyzstan topped Group A ahead of Zanzibar after wins over Gagauzia and Greenland but fell in the semi-finals, beaten 3-2 after extra-time by Crimea, the Group B runners-up to North Cyprus. Kyrgyzstan then beat Zanzibar 9-8 on penalties in the third-place play-off after a 2-2 draw.

A tired Tibet, without star man Dorjee Tsawa, who plays in the Swiss top flight, suffered the heaviest defeat, 10-0 against North Cyprus.

The tournament suffered from poor attendances. Up to 7,000 were expected for the Final at the 28,000-capacity Ataturk stadium in the capital, Lefkosa (Nicosia), but only a few hundred turned up. "The crowds were not very good but the national team have been playing for only a year or so," said organiser Cengiz Uzun of the North Cyprus football federation. "We have to carry on playing."

If the Greek Cypriot government accept a United Nations plan to reunite the island, North Cyprus want to continue playing as a separate entity and then possibly join UEFA and FIFA.

Steve Menary