

Then there were three...



Sapmi success... the squad hoist the Viva World Cup trophy

A TEAM REPRESENTING the Sami people of Lapland won the inaugural Viva World Cup, held in Hyeres in Provence in November, but the tournament title was a distinct misnomer since only three teams competed.

The VWC, created for non-FIFA-affiliated sides, was originally meant to have 16 teams and was going to be staged in North Cyprus. However, the organisers, the New Federation Board, fell out with the North Cyprus federation, the KTFB, and the event effectively split in two. The NF Board decided to stage its competition in France instead, while the KTFB put on a rival tournament, the ELF Cup, at the same time. Unlike the NF Board, the North Cypriots offered to pay the expenses of visiting teams and managed to lure original VWC contenders such as Greenland.

Only six teams were in the VWC draw in September, and the event was further damaged by the withdrawal of West Papua and a team representing Europe's gypsies. Then, on the eve of the finals, the Southern Cameroon squad – representing the independence-seeking region

of the African state – were unable to travel to Provence because of financial difficulties and forfeited each match 3-0. That left only hosts Occitania, a team representing the two million people in the south of France who still speak the medieval language of Oc, an amateur Monaco side and Sapmi (the Sami language word for the Lapland region).

Strongest squad

The latter had by far the strongest squad, with several players from Scandinavian league clubs, including Eric Lamoy of Swedish side Degerfors and two from Norway – Steffen Nystrom of Moss and Tom Hogli, a former Norwegian Under-21 international, of Bodo/Glimt. Also, coach Ivar Morten Normark has spent three years working in the Norwegian top division.

Sapmi beat Occitania 7-0 and then Monaco 14-0 to earn their place in the Final, where they met the Monegasques, 3-2 conquerors of Occitania in the group's other game. Monaco's first tie with Sapmi had been bad-tempered, and the rough

tactics of the Principality players in the decider led to them having two men sent off. Sapmi took advantage, running riot to win 21-1.

Normark, who was until recently in charge of Tromso, said: "The standard of the other teams was not so good, and that is a challenge for the NF Board, to find better teams. But the tournament is a great idea. I don't care about politics; the important thing is that people play football and represent themselves."

Despite the withdrawals and funding difficulties, organiser Jean-Luc Kit believes that staging the event at all was an achievement. "The first edition was so difficult to organise but now the VWC exists. All are pioneers in this new competition," said Kit, who, along with NF Board president Christian Michelis, was inspired to hold a world cup for "nations that don't exist" when seeing the Island Games football tournament in Jersey in 1997.

The German region of South Lower Saxony and Lapland are potential venues for a second edition. But given the funding problems, there is some doubt about whether it will be held.

Steve Menary