

History of The IFA

In the early nineties many supporters, particularly ex-pats kept in touch with other fans via email. These people tended to be mainly people in the technical or academic worlds as email was widely available in those professions.

The first ever internet organised football match was held at Nottingham on 30th July 1995 between Leeds Lards 6 v 3 Internet Hotspurs, the attendance was just 12!

At the time of Euro 96, Dave "Voice of Football" Walmsley wanted to show that football fans could come together in the spirit of the game, play football and build bridges between their respective teams. This was after Graham Kelly the then chief of the FA was publicly sceptical about the ability of English football supporters to behave themselves at Euro 96.

Through the use of email discussion groups, Dave organised a tournament to be held on June 9th 1996 in Nottingham, one of the host cities for Euro 96 and EuroNET 96 was born. From that point it grew to represent the teams of football e-mail discussion groups and message boards across the UK.

In 1997 Dave Walmsley stepped down as tournament organiser and was replaced by Roger Goodair and John Boocock who had helped out with the first event. Dave is honoured by the Dave Walmsley Trophy which is presented to the man of the match in each annual tournament Final.

Euro 97 was run over two days 28/29 June 1997 and was held in Middlesbrough at the Wilf Mannion Sports Centre. Former Great Britain and Middlesbrough player, Wilf Mannion presented the trophy.

1997 also saw League and Cup formats introduced and name Internet Football Association was born to run these competitions.

Euro 98 was held at Reading RUFC 18/19 July. The first International internet organised game was held at Reading between England 5 v 1 Scotland

With the expansion of the world wide web EuroNET continued to grow and soon began to include fans from all backgrounds and walks of life who communicated via message boards and email lists. To better represent the world wide interest the tournament now had, the name of Euro 99 was changed to WorldNET 99 and was held in Leicester 17/18 July at Victoria Park.

Worldnet 2000 was held in Leeds on July 22/23 for the first time.

Our tournament, now regularly run at the University of Leeds has been featured heavily on Sky Sports Television, in the print media and on UK Radio, we've hosted teams from Greece, Africa, Italy Ireland and France and sees over a thousand fans enjoy two days of football.

WorldNET 2007 saw our greatest number of teams ever, 72 playing for both the Cup and the Plate.

We have grown from the original 16 teams to over a hundred teams. We currently have an annual two-day knock out tournament, a league and a cup competition. Our competitions are UK based and encourage fans to play football regardless of their ability, gender, race or age.

Our teams normally play their league matches in the mornings before "the big match" and several clubs have been very helpful in ensuring that all those who have played in these matches are able to attend "the big match" that follows. Some clubs give free tickets to the visitors, others ensure that the visitors are able to buy tickets for the match. This is often done in conjunction with official supporters clubs, supporter's trusts and ISAs in which many of our players are leading lights.

Internet football is not just about winning. It's about taking part and building bridges between rival sets of supporters.

Having said that we consider our leagues, competitions and tournaments professionally run and allow for an element of competition and pride in supporting one's home team. We have also ensured that we involve ourselves in major football issues of the day especially anti-racism and anti-sectarianism. We have been successful in bringing fans of opposing teams together in the spirit of the game, to the point where quite unusual alliances and friendships have sprung up. None less than when the IFA cup takes place and teams criss-cross the Anglo Scottish border in search of cup glory.

Wherever possible we encourage teams to forge links with their parent clubs - to the point where teams who have won our competitions have been presented to supporters on the pitch at senior games, have featured in club programmes and in the case of some clubs have been given official recognition along with support of a more material kind. This has taken the form of donations of kit, use of facilities and assistance with transport costs. The IFA now has members from all the Scottish and all the English divisions as well as a number of teams from mainland Europe, Africa and Ireland.

WorldNET 2008 saw the introduction of an 8 team veteran's tournament as some of us are now getting older! In 2009 the veteran's tournament has doubled in size to 16 teams and provides a chance for the over 30s to show off their silky skills. The 2009 Cup and Plate competition has 64 entrants. WorldNET09 is to be held in Leeds on 24/25/26 July where we will also feature the IFA Cup Final and the IFA England v Scotland International.