

UEFA for Football Play-Offs

At yesterday's meeting of the Organizing Committee for the 1999 Football Play-Offs the Chair of the Committee Mr. Fahnler of UEFA announced that the game between Velez and Posusje will be played at the stadium in Vrapcici where Velez have been playing during the season.

Mr. Fahnler explained that the primary reason for this decision was in accordance with the decision of the 25 May which stated that teams would host matches at their own stadiums or soccer fields. He stated that the previous schedule, where Velez were due to host Posusje at the Bijeli Brijeg Stadium, was not in line with the 25 May decision and that he wished to correct this mistake. He also stated that the two clubs should start negotiating immediately after this to share the Bijeli Brijeg stadium, and the issue of one single league because this is the last time that UEFA will tolerate a tournament like this with more than one league.

Mr. Fahnler added that he believed that owing to this controversy, the security situation was not conducive for playing the game at Bijeli Brijeg on Saturday. He based this estimate on articles and media reports which have been piling up on his desk in Vienna for the past few weeks which emphasised the contradictions in the schedule and the decision of 25 May in relation to the Velez Posusje game. This decision was taken by UEFA alone, but has the support of OHR.

Discussions to reach an agreement to share the stadium in the future will begin following the completion of the play-offs under the chairmanship of OHR and UEFA. Any of the parties which do not cooperate in this process will face appropriate sanctions including a lengthy ban on participation in European club competitions. The time has finally come for some good will and understanding – this cannot be created by the International Community.

While we understand the disappointment of Velez Football Club and its supporters following this decision, the Mostar derby on 16 June 1999 represents an important step both for this club and another important phase in the reconciliation process for Mostar. We have learned today that the BiH Football Association teams intend to withdraw from the competition – we understand that Mr. Fahnler has asked them to reconsider this decision and has asked both Associations to arrive at a compromise formula and advise him by 0900hrs tomorrow.

We agree that instead of solid preparations and good will, the Velez-Posusje match has been politicised by various organisations and parties. This is quite unacceptable, as has been the provocative role of some of the media.

OHR has maintained from the very beginning that the play-off clubs and football supporters in Mostar should not be deprived of the opportunity to participate in the three most prestigious competitions in Europe. Therefore, despite the politicisation of these play-offs, we still hope that a negotiated solution between the two football associations can be reached before 0900hrs tomorrow when the referees arrive.