



Friedrich Stickler, European Football Pool president and UEFA-Intertoto Cup commission member

A new format has given the UEFA-Intertoto Cup a fresh start. Featuring more flexible match dates, the new formula has persuaded additional entities, including the

football associations of England, Italy, Spain and Portugal

to take part in this competition, which is of paramount importance to toto organizations throughout Europe.

The most important change in the competition concerns the structure, which has been revised to comprise five rounds of home-and-away ties played according to the cup/knock-out system. Clubs from the strongest associations in UEFA's ranking table of coefficients will not join the competition until the second or third rounds, which enables clubs from Spain and Italy to take part for the first time. In the past, date problems have prevented clubs from those countries from participating. Each association was entitled to request a maximum of two places, which have to be confirmed before the draw. No fewer than 45 UEFA member associations have so far declared their intention to take part in the competition. Only Scotland, Moldova, Andorra, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liechtenstein and San Marino will not be taking part.



The first round, involving 40 clubs, will be played on 20/21 June (first legs) and 27/28 June (return legs). The 20 first-round winners will then go through to the second round, to be played on 4/5 and 11/12 July 1998, where they will be joined by 12 clubs from the top 12 associations (as per UEFA's ranking table of coefficients). On 18/19 and 25 July 1998, the 16 second-round winners will contest the third round alongside 8 clubs from the top 8 associations (as per the ranking table of coefficients). The twelve winners of the third round qualify for the semi-final round on 29 July and 5 August 1998. The finals, involving the six winning teams from the semi-final round, will take place on 11 and 25 August, on the same dates as the second qualifying phase for the UEFA Cup. As last season, the three successful UEFA-Intertoto Cup participants will earn a place in the first round of the UEFA Cup.

The draw for the first three rounds of the UEFA-Intertoto Cup will be made at UEFA's headquarters in Nyon on 24 April 1998. The semi-final and final ties will be drawn in Nyon prior to the third round. □