



STAR SUPPORT FOR NEW HEALTH PROGRAMME

Leading footballers from around the world have lent their weight to FIFA's new "The 11 for Health" programme – a health awareness project which uses the popularity of football to highlight and tackle urgent global health issues.

The daunting sight of straggly-haired Spain and Barcelona defender Carles Puyol standing between a striker and the goal has often been enough to cast doubt in the minds of even the most talented scorers. But as the experienced 32-year-old prepares for his third successive FIFA World Cup™ at the heart of the Spanish defence,

he can also now be seen in a gentler role – explaining to children that while clean sheets may be important in football, clean hands are even more important.

"Protect your goal with a strong defence," Puyol advises in the booklet and video accompanying the new programme. "Protect yourself from infections by

washing your hands before eating and cooking, and after using the toilet."

Puyol is just one member of an impressive "World XI" enlisted by FIFA to promote the 11 simple but effective health messages taught within the programme. Others include the 2009 FIFA World Player Lionel Messi, who extols the virtues of "eating

a balanced diet", and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, who sets out the importance of "using treated bed nets" to protect against malaria.

The support of these big-name stars is just the icing on the cake, however. To ensure that the messages are heard and heeded, particularly in parts of the world where health education is sorely lacking, the FIFA Medical Assessment and Research Centre (F-MARC) has spent the last few years carefully designing and fine-tuning the structure of the programme.

Since the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ will be played in South Africa, it was decided to develop and test "The 11 for Health" first in Africa, even though the programme will be universally applicable, and to adapt the individual messages of subsequent versions to the predominant health concerns in the regions or continents involved.

As its starting point, F-MARC based the content of the programme on the top ten health issues worldwide as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), plus another two identified in consultation with African physicians, public health experts and non-governmental organisations. The overall aim was to address some of the underlying risk factors related to

common causes of disease in low- and medium-income countries, and to develop a programme that would prove sustainable within individual communities.

Making a difference

"Prevention of diseases requires behavioural change," explains F-MARC professor Colin Fuller, who has been instrumental in developing the programme and conducting studies into its effectiveness. "According to the WHO, behavioural change first requires understanding. This means that any attempts to reduce communicable and non-communicable diseases must be underpinned by improvements in the community's level of knowledge about the causes and prevention of these diseases."

The result of this strategy was the creation of 11 health messages designed to increase children's knowledge about →



"Football is the greatest game in the world. It is also a fun way to get fit and to stay healthy."

Benni McCarthy



Thierry Henry

"In football, successful teams respect the contributions made by all players. In life, men and women should respect each other; otherwise, it's like playing football with only half a team."

SPREADING THE WORD

"The 11 for Health" messages:

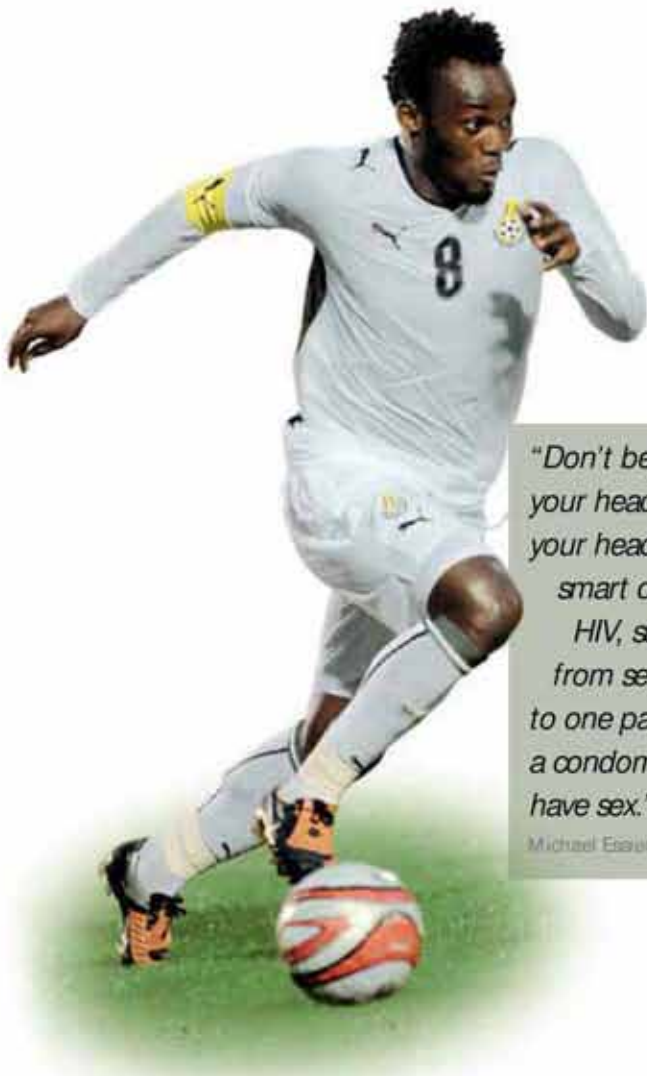
1. Play football
2. Respect girls and women
3. Protect yourself from HIV
4. Avoid drugs and alcohol
5. Use treated bed nets
6. Wash your hands
7. Drink clean water
8. Eat a balanced diet
9. Vaccinate yourself and your family
10. Take your prescribed medication
11. Fair play

The 11 corresponding football skills:

- Play football
- Passing
- Heading
- Dribbling
- Shielding
- Defending
- Trapping
- Building fitness
- Shooting
- Goalkeeping
- Teamwork

Ambassador:

- Benni McCarthy
- Thierry Henry
- Michael Essien
- Cristiano Ronaldo
- Samuel Eto'o
- Carles Puyol
- Portia Modise
- Lionel Messi
- Didier Drogba
- Gianluigi Buffon
- Fabio Capello



"Don't be afraid to use your head in football. Use your head also to make smart decisions to avoid HIV, such as abstaining from sex, being faithful to one partner and using a condom every time you have sex."

Michael Essien



Carlos Puyol

"Protect your goal with a strong defence. Protect yourself from infections by washing your hands before eating and cooking and after using the toilet."

the causes and prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases and to improve their skills and behaviour towards these diseases. Together with GrassrootSoccer, a South Africa-based non-governmental organisation, these messages were worked into an interactive, football-inspired programme in which each of the messages is linked to a specific football theme or exercise. The use of treated bed nets is, for example, paired with the skill of shielding a football. Using your head literally within a game is mirrored by the figurative need to "use your head" to protect yourself against HIV (see factbox for full list of themes).

While there are currently many public health initiatives based on exercise and others based on specific education concepts, "The 11 for Health" is rare in the way it brings both together. Indeed the programme emerged from the combination of two central F-MARC themes: using football as a healthy leisure activity in its own right, and harnessing its huge popularity to deliver education and promote health.

"The 11 for Health' programme focuses on delivering health education within a football environment," explains F-MARC chairman Prof. Jiri Dvorak. "Promoting health messages in this way has several

unique advantages. Firstly, interest in football transcends social and economic status, age, gender, location, religion, culture and language. Secondly, football has minimal equipment requirements, so participation can indeed be universal. Thirdly, football teams can operate independently of government and non-government organisations and resources, which means there will be few resource and security issues. Finally, football is full of metaphors and analogies that can make health learning much more memorable. And, unlike with some other exercise programmes, playing football is fun and not considered a tedious obligation."

Rigorous testing

When it came to putting the theory into practice, carefully selected coaches were first trained to ensure the effective delivery of the underlying health messages through the programme's group activities. The first testing then began with a pilot study developed for school-age children living in the South African township of Khayelitsha. Run over an 11-week period, the pilot project was followed up with an assessment of how well the programme's messages had been absorbed by the 150 participating school children.

The results were compared with an identical assessment of another 150 children who had only taken part in the footballing parts of the programme. The comparison clearly demonstrated that the group which had taken part in the complete programme had gained considerable knowledge about hygiene, clean drinking water, vaccination, medication use, HIV, drug

abuse and malaria prevention. A follow-up assessment three months later also showed that the children had maintained their high level of knowledge. The group that had only played football showed no change in health knowledge, but were not left at a disadvantage: following completion of the assessments they were given access to the full programme and demonstrated similar knowledge gains.

Other detailed findings, due to be published in the June 2010 issue of the British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM), included an interesting observation that younger children learned more than older ones.

Nearly all of the children said that they had enjoyed taking part in the programme. They described the sessions as being easy to understand and said that their attitude towards health had changed as a result of their involvement. The coaches were also enthusiastic and committed, and the programme's supervisors said it had been inspiring to see them becoming more confident and skilled as the project progressed.

Describing the initial results as "extremely encouraging", the F-MARC team then decided to further test the different ways of implementing the programme with two further studies – one in Zimbabwe and one in Mauritius. In Zimbabwe, F-MARC will again work with GrassrootSoccer, but within a different socio-cultural setting to the Khayelitsha pilot, while the Mauritius study will be run under the leadership of the Mauritius Football Association

"Players use their body to shield the ball from opponents. Use a treated bed net, while you sleep, to protect yourself from malaria."

Samuel Eto'o



in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health. The findings from these two studies will finally be examined to establish a "best practice" for implementing the

programme on a wider scale, whether for implementation by football associations, government bodies or non-governmental organisations. →



Cristiano Ronaldo

"Forwards make the right moves on the pitch to avoid defenders. Make the right moves off the pitch to avoid drugs and alcohol."



Portia Modise

"Players can control the ball with all parts of their body. You can control your health by drinking only boiled or bottled water."

"Footballers eat the right diet to maintain their fitness throughout a game. Eat a balanced diet to stay fit and healthy throughout life."



Lionel Messi

"Forwards practise shots on goal so they can score in most situations. Vaccinations are shots that save lives; find out which vaccinations you and your family have already received and which ones you still need."



Didier Drogba

Working with partners

"FIFA's member associations are obviously our primary partners in implementing our preventative programmes," explains Dvorak. "We are therefore very much looking forward to the results of this last study."

Support for the programme from governmental institutions such as ministries of health or education is also

seen as essential and the backing from Mauritius is particularly encouraging. Non-communicable diseases are rife in Mauritius, with almost 50% of the population suffering preliminary or full-blown diabetes, and the country's ministers for health, education and sport have all guaranteed F-MARC their government's full support.

South Africa's Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, has also expressed his support for the programme as an effective means of improving public health and has even called for a meeting of African leaders to discuss the programme's wide-scale adoption across the continent.

While parts of the initial programme were specifically catered towards the



Youngsters at the "The 11 for Health" pilot project in Mauritius.



Fabio Capello

“Support your teammates on and off the pitch. Build your team with people you trust and people who care about you and your health.”



Gianluigi Buffon

“Players listen carefully to their coach’s advice. You should listen to the advice provided by your doctor and take your prescribed medication at all times.”

needs of the children in Khayelitsha, its overall structure can be readily adapted for implementation in similar settings located in other geographic areas, such as East and West Africa, Oceania, Asia and South America.

No less importantly, the simplicity of the messages and the handy way they can be tied in with the skills of football clearly

appeals to healthcare policy-makers and leading football players.

“We have had support not only from the current stars featured in the programme videos and brochures, but also from former icons of African football, such as Lucas Radebe, Bwalya Kalusha, Roger Milla and Abedi Pelé, which is most encouraging,” notes Dvorak.

In the second half of this year, as attention turns from the newly crowned champions of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ to the tantalising prospect of the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ in Brazil, F-MARC will be busy implementing “The 11 for Health” across Africa as well as developing a plan of action with other FIFA member associations for wider adoption in South America and other corners of the globe. When the final whistle sounds in Johannesburg’s Soccer City on 11 July it will mark the end of South Africa’s footballing festival – but only the start of the medical legacy which FIFA plans to leave behind for Africa as a whole. ■



FIFA’s Chief Medical Officer with “The 11 for Health” coaches in Khayelitsha.

“Prevention of diseases requires behavioural change, which in turn requires understanding – so our efforts must be underpinned by improvements in each community’s level of knowledge.”

F-MARC professor Colin Fuller