

Scotland set to become world champions (again!)

■ A jubilant supporter embraces Denis Law after Scotland's victory over England at Wembley in 1967.

By Gordon Blackstock

ALLEX McLEISH takes charge of his first Scotland game when his footballers play Georgia in a European Championship qualifier on March 24.

And the Tartan Army might have good cause to celebrate big time. Because victory over the former Soviet country will make Scotland the new holders of the title Unofficial Football World Champions.

The UFWC uses a knockout title system similar to boxing. It was dreamed up five years ago by football enthusiasts arguing on the Internet about which was the best international team of all time.

They decided the only way to settle it was to go back to the first international game ever played between two countries.

According to Paul Brown (32), author of *The Unofficial Football World Championship*, inspiration behind the idea comes, in part, from the Tartan Army.

The Englishman explained, "The basis lies in the famous Scotland v. England match in 1967 when England had just won the World Cup.

Claim

"As we all know Scotland won that day and subsequently a lot of their supporters claimed beating the World Cup holders meant they were now the best team in the world.

"Taking every game played as world champions as a title defence is the thinking behind the idea.

"So we looked at the very first international game in 1872 and traced who would be the world title holders from there."

That original game was a 0-0 draw between England and Scotland, played in Glasgow. But the following year in London, England thumped the Scots 4-2.

As the Auld Enemies were the only two countries in the world with international teams, Paul argues that made England the first unofficial football world champions!

While the popularity of football across the globe exploded over the next 50 years, the home nations rarely played abroad.

Paul carefully tracked how the UFWC title bounced between the British teams until being snatched abroad for the first time in 1931.

Rematch

"One of the best teams in the world at that time was Austria and they beat England, who would have then been the UFWC champions.

"But that didn't last long — England beat them in a rematch four months later."

In 1930, the rest of the world took part in the very first World Cup — minus any British teams.

"The World Cup was a bit of a shambles to begin with — the first only had 13 teams," says Paul.

"For some reason FIFA didn't invite any of the British nations. That suited them as they preferred to play in their own home nations tournament anyway."

England took part in the World Cup for the first time in 1950.

There wasn't much of a success for them. Not only did they go out at the group stages, they even suffered a shock defeat to the United States.

Victory over Georgia means we'll reclaim title we last held 40 years ago

And with that 1-0 loss, the UFWC title which England had been holding passed on to the new champs — America.

The Yanks are by no means the unlikely UFWC titleholders, though. Angola, Bolivia and even the Dutch Antilles have all been champs at some point.

Current title-holders are Georgia, who wrested it from Uruguay last year and have since successfully defended it against Turkey.

And yet, Paul reveals one team has dominated the UFWC rankings above all others — including England, Germany and even Brazil.

"Over the years, the team who has held the title the longest is Scotland.

"They've spent a staggering 12,999 days as the unofficial champions of the world!

Ranking

"The second ranking team is England, then Argentina.

"I've had plenty of comments from people who say this is obviously the brainchild of some Tartan Army anorak, but it's not.

"No-one involved in the project is Scottish, although being from Newcastle I suppose I'm a bit more sympathetic to the Tartan Army's cause than some."

During Paul's research he discovered that in 1966 England not only became official world champions when they beat Germany. But by coincidence, they also gained the unofficial title Germany had taken from the Russians just three days earlier as well.

So the English team could have claimed to be both the official and unofficial champions of the world at the time!

Paul adds, "When the Scots beat them in 1967, it was also the last time Scotland held the title as they lost later the following month to the Soviet Union. It has never been back since so the Georgia match will be very interesting."



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