

Are the "Hoppers" on the hop?

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Robert Brookes previews the new soccer season on Switzerland and asks:

Are the 'Hoppers on the hop?

THESE are early days to be predicting who will be football champions at the end of the season. But one thing is clear. Switzerland's oldest club, St. Gallen (founded in 1879) is a force to be reckoned with.

After only five matches in the National 'A' League championship, St. Gallen is the only team still unbeaten and heads the table.

St. Gallen went to Zurich's Hardturm stadium and beat last season's champions and cup winners Grasshoppers by two goals to one – no mean feat as Grasshoppers had not been defeated in the league at home since April, 1981.

Under new Yugoslav-born trainer Miroslav Blazevic, Grasshoppers learned that defending the champions title this season is going to be no easy task.

Nevertheless, the 'Hoppers' are now second in the table after the first five games and must remain firm favourites to remain

in the top three positions.

Another team which has showed promise in the early stages of the season is Sion from canton Valais. They were standing third in the league table, their only defeat coming away in St. Gallen.

The "bridesmaids" of Swiss football last season, Servette of Geneva, who were league runners-up and cup finalists, are not faring so well. The loss of midfield star Lucien Favre to French club Toulouse, and a spate of injuries have clearly upset their rhythm so far.

FC Zurich have slipped over the past few years and were upset last season by the controversial departure of trainer Daniel Jeandupeux.

His replacement, Hans Kodric, has strengthened the squad but there are still persistent rumours of internal disputes.

The new clubs in the 'A' League, Chiasso and La Chaux-de-Fonds, have begun quite promisingly and any talk of slipping back down into the 'B' League is rather premature.

However according to a computer prediction in the *Schweizer Illustrierte* magazine, both will be relegated at the end of the season, Chiasso finishing bottom with only eight points and La Chaux-de-Fonds with nine.

But with each team having four points already, the computer should really think again!

The computer predicts that Grasshoppers will win their 20th league title with 50 points, Neuchâtel Xamax will be runners-up, also with 50 points, and Lausanne will be third.

How many changes of trainers will there be when the dust settles on the current season?

The computer is not going to stick its neck out there, but the job of a soccer trainer is just as hazardous in Switzerland as in many other countries.

Of the 16 teams in the 'A' league, no fewer than seven have new men in control this season.

The chairmen of the National League have decided not to allow a second foreign player for each team. One, they feel, is enough.

Sion had proposed that clubs be allowed to include two foreign players, as in many neighbouring countries, but the idea was turned down by 15 votes to 14.

The decision supports the Swiss national team coach, Paul Wolfisberg, who feels a second foreign player in each team would lead clubs to neglect their obligations to produce young Swiss players for the future.

The Swiss Football Association stated its view clearly in the bulletin of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA):

"It is better to invest in improving the coaching of youngsters than to offer contracts to certain foreign players who are more interested in the beauties of the Swiss landscape and the solidity of the Swiss franc than they are in having an impressive final fling to their playing careers".

Of the foreign players who have come to play in Switzerland this season, former Liverpool striker David Fairclough is perhaps the most notable.

David, 26, was approached in the summer by an agent who said



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David Fairclough joins Lucerne

several Swiss sides had expressed an interest in signing him.

He had offers from Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Greece and West Germany, but eventually opted for Lucerne.

"I wanted a change from England. Maybe if I had had an offer from a really top club, I might have considered staying but I felt it was time to leave the country", he said.

Dubbed "Super Sub" in 1976

because of his many appearances as Liverpool's substitute, it was disappointing after playing in the first team to find he was back on the subs' bench for the next game.

"It was something I gradually had to live with. That was the way the manager felt he was best using the team by having 12 men instead of 11", he said.

Before arriving in Switzerland David did not know too much about the Swiss soccer scene.

"I'd seen the national side against England and Scotland and after a few weeks of the new season with Lucerne, I've got a fair idea of what it's all about", he said.

"Swiss soccer is just as competitive as in England but the styles are completely different".

David said it was too much to expect Lucerne to finish league champions: "We have a very young team and maybe third or fourth position with a UEFA Cup entry for next season would be a good achievement for us".



The new mascot for the Swiss national soccer XI

Confidence in Paul

SWITZERLAND'S national soccer team coach, Paul Wolfisberg, has been given a vote of confidence by the Swiss Football Association.

The Association's central committee has announced that Wolfisberg's contract has been extended for another three years to the end of June 1986.

The decision means that Wolfisberg can now get down to the task of getting Switzerland through to the final stages of the

1986 World Cup finals in Mexico.

If Switzerland does not reach the finals and Wolfisberg does not wish to stay as national team coach, he can announce his intention to resign in 1985. This, says the Association, would give adequate time to find a successor.

The success rate of the Swiss national team under Wolfisberg is shown in this table giving comparisons with his immediate predecessors:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Foni	19	4	3	12	17	32	11
Ballabio	17	5	4	8	24	25	14
Maurer	10	5	2	3	19	11	12
Michaud	7	1	5	1	4	7	7
Blazevic	2	0	0	2	2	5	0
Hüssy	26	6	4	16	19	31	16
Vonlanthen	15	4	1	10	11	25	9
Walker	16	4	1	11	15	33	9
Wolfisberg	22	9	8	5	27	26	26

SWISS SOCCER

'A' Division	P	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
St. Gallen	5	4	1	-	13	7
Grasshoppers Zurich	5	4	-	1	11	4
Sion	5	4	-	1	11	5
Zürich	5	3	1	1	13	9
Xamax Neuchatel	5	2	2	1	9	5
Servette Geneva	5	2	1	2	10	9
Young Boys Berne	5	2	1	2	7	7
Basle	5	2	-	3	11	12
Chaux-de-Fds.	5	-	4	1	10	11
Aarau	5	1	2	2	6	7
Lausanne	5	2	-	3	5	7
Lucerne	5	2	-	3	6	10
Chiasso	5	2	-	3	5	11
Vevey	5	1	1	3	4	6
Wettingen	5	1	1	3	7	11
Bellinzona	5	1	-	4	7	14

'B' Division	P	W	D	L	Gls	Pts
Martigny	5	3	1	1	17	8
Lugano	5	2	3	0	12	5
Grenchen	5	2	3	0	10	6
Monthey	5	2	3	0	11	8
Winterthur	5	2	2	1	10	8
SC Zug	5	2	2	1	9	8
Laufen	5	2	2	1	8	8
Fribourg	5	1	3	1	8	7
Bulle	5	1	3	1	10	9
Mendrisio	5	1	3	1	8	8
Baden	5	2	1	2	12	15
Biel	5	0	4	1	6	9
Red Star Zurich	5	1	1	3	10	9
Chênois	5	1	1	3	4	9
Locarno	5	1	0	4	6	14
Nordstern Basle	5	0	2	3	3	13