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19 coaches set for Italy seminar

A group of 19 coaches will be travelling to Italy later this month to take part in a seven-day seminar at the technical base of the Italian football federation (FIGC) in Coverciano.

It promises to be an enriching experience for the Maltese delegation as the programme comprises practical and theoretical sessions on a variety of interesting subjects, including modern systems of play, fitness training, diet, sports psychology, doping and tactics, plus visits to clubs in the Tuscan region.

The Malta Football Coaches Association (MFCA) is co-ordinating this visit in conjunction with its Italian counterpart, the Associazione Italiana Allenatori Calcio (AIAC), and with the financial support of the European Commission through Erasmus+ programme.

Lolly Aquilina, the president of the MFCA, said the association, together with the European Union Programmes Agency (eupa), have been working on this initiative for the past year.

"Without the support of eupa, this event would not have been possible," Aquilina told a news conference at the Intercontinental Hotel yesterday.

"Our objective is to help our coaches enhance their knowledge and experience through overseas visits.

"It was difficult for us to organise such visits due to financial constraints but, throughout the years, we have brought a number of foreign coaches to conduct seminars and lectures for our members."

Aquilina said the MFCA will be organising a series of instructional meetings to ensure that the coaches attending the March 22-29 seminar will share their knowledge and experiences with the other members of the association.

The support of Renzo Ulivieri, the president of AIAC, was instrumental in helping the MFCA organise this seminar in Coverciano.

"The MFCA is affiliated to AEFCA, the Alliance of European Football Coaches Associations," Aquilina said.

"I met Renzo Ulivieri, the president of AIAC, during an AEFCA symposium.

"I told him that we were thinking of sending a group of Maltese coaches to Coverciano and he immediately pledged his full co-operation.

"We have an excellent relationship with Ulivieri who was the special guest for the MFCA 50th anniversary celebrations in 2009."

Aquilina explained that, after the MFCA's application for EU funds was approved, 39 coaches applied to participate in this seminar.

The European Commission allocated around €19,400 for this project and set a quota of 11 candidates but the number eventually rose to 19 after the MFCA secured the backing of a sponsor who wanted to remain anonymous.

Aquilina explained that the MFCA set up a three-man selection panel to interview and rank the candidates.

"There are UEFA A, B and C coaches in the 19-strong group as we wanted to offer this experience to candidates of different abilities and qualifications," Aquilina said.

"We also received applications from coaches who hold a Pro Licence but these were not selected as they have already been to Coverciano and we want to give a chance to others who haven't had this kind of experience."

Erasmus+ grants

Jessica Giordimaina, from eupa, explained that different sectors, such as sport, health and education, can benefit from EU grants under Erasmus+.

"The main concept is knowledge-sharing," Giordimaina said.

"Through the Erasmus+ projects, participants have first-hand experience of what's going on in their respective fields in other countries."

Erasmus+ is the new EU programme for Education, Training, Youth, and Sport for the period 2014-2020.

With a budget of €14.7 billion, Erasmus+ has succeeded the Leonardo Da Vinci programme which ran from 2007 to 2013.

Giordimaina said that eupa has received a healthy number of proposals for sports-related exchange programmes from Maltese organisations.

"Recently, we supported a project by the Malta FA while a number of football nurseries, including those of Hibernians, Sliema Wanderers, Žejtun and Luxol St Andrew's, have also benefited from EU educational initiatives," she said.

Tony Amaira, from the Parliamentary Secretariat for Sport, was also present for yesterday's news conference.

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