

# media release

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## **Malta Soccer Trophy 40+ : The Countdown Has Started**

When former “Bundesliga” and FIFA referee Bernd Heynemann blows the starting whistle at Luxol Sports Ground in Malta on Thursday, 9th February at 10.30 hrs, he will herald the start of the Malta Soccer Trophy 40+, the international soccer tournament for players over 40 years of age.

In the first match, the 40+ team of German VfR Aalen will play against BSC Old Boys Basel from Switzerland. Supported by the Malta Tourism Authority, this football tournament has evoked considerable interest amongst European 40+ teams and promises to grow into an annual sporting event on an international scale.

The tournament finals will be held on Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup> 2017. Tourism Minister Hon. Dr. Edward Zammit Lewis, will present the Trophy to the winning team.

At this point in time it is not known which of the teams will move into the final games. It is certain however, that the Maltese 40+ selection is a hot contender to reach the final. Malta’s “national team” was set up by Masters Football Malta and consists of some well-known, former professionals. Mr. Mario Meli, President of Masters Football Malta, recruited two ex-professionals, namely Brian Said and Gilbert Agius, whose reputation is not only excellent in Malta. In addition to these former heroes of Maltese football other high-caliber players will surely join the Maltese team and turn it into a frontrunner. This can be considered as an exceptional situation for the Maltese team who is usually only an outsider at European and international tournaments.

The German teams are also present with team members who “know what they are doing”. With regards to the SG Hoechst Classique team - the three-time German 40+ runner-up - team captain Andreas Grabitsch and striker Sven Müller won very special awards within the framework of the German 40+ Championships in 2009 and 2012. In 2009, Grabitsch was elected as the best player by the 10 coaches of the tournament and Müller won the title “goal-getter cannon” in 2012. VfB Giessen’s Claus Peter Zick, Björn Pistauer (both SG Eintracht Frankfurt), Thomas Vollmer (TSV 1860 München) and Claudius Weber (FSV Mainz 05) are players who are experienced with Germany’s premier league.

TSV Reinbek was Hamburg’s regional champion several times and in 2015 the team achieved the third place at the German 40+ Championships in Berlin. The Hamburg suburb club consists of various third-league players contributing to the high quality level of this team.

VfR Aalen can also boast with some second league and third league players and is among the forerunners - thanks to its technical skills and team spirit. TSV 1880 Wasserburg, the traditional club

from Upper Bavaria, won the Inn/Salzach district championship circuit in 2016 and is on its way to the Bavarian 40+ Championship.

The Hessian representative FSV Hailer qualified for the semi-final in this year's Gelnhausen district cup. Thanks to a 4:3 victory against the defending champion ASG Birstein, the Hailer team is in a position to enter the final.

The Berlin representative SV Lichtenberg 47, which plays in Berlin's highest 40+ division - the Berlin club league- should not be underrated. Lichtenberg's division competitor is the reigning German 40+ champion Sp.Vg.Blau-Weiß 1890 Berlin. At a home game, SV Lichtenberg only lost 1:2 against Sp.Vg.Blau-Weiß 1890 Berlin. They are now ranked 9th and are among the strongest Berlin 40+ teams.

The DJK Schwabsberg/Buch team is Germany's eighth representative at the Malta Soccer Trophy 40+ and experienced with Malta. In November 2015, the team from Baden-Wuerttemberg lost two games against Maltese representative teams. With Heiko Gotschke (former U21 national player from German Democratic Republic and former professional at LOK Leipzig in the GDR premier league) and Thomas Freller (former guest player in the 2nd Maltese League) DJK Schwabsberg/Buch has strengthened the team in order to avoid another defeat.

The Swiss representative BSC Old Boys Basel plays in the Northern Swiss football association's Senior 40+ League for several years. After a successful first round, the team excellently placed 4th place among 11 teams. The Old Boys' preliminaries record is: 10 games, of which 5 were won, 3 ended undecided and only 2 defeats. Being 10 points behind league leader FC Arlesheim, the promotion to the highest Swiss senior division 40+ is difficult, but should still be feasible. With a result of 1:1, the Basler Sport Club Old Boys was the only team to be able to take away points from the current league leader. The Old Boys' Basel biggest success and challenge however is the participation in the Malta Soccer Trophy 40+. For the first time ever, a senior team of the Old Boys Basel will play an international tournament abroad. Thus, they have the unique opportunity to present themselves but also the Swiss senior football at this football event.

All teams are accommodated at Hotel Topaz in St. Paul's Bay. The hotel will also be the venue of the "After Match Parties" on Thursday (09.02.) and Friday (10.02.) as well as of the "Players Night" on Saturday, 11.02. On this evening, the award ceremonies for the teams and players will also take place. At around 20.00 hrs, Maltese supporters and the supporters of the participant teams can mingle with the players in the hotel's festival hall. The Topaz crew together with Piroška Fu will ensure that the teams and fans are spoiled with food and drinks and entertained with great music from the 70s-90s.

Marketing Manager Dietmar Erk of organizer "Sportxmedia" and Frank Seebald, Managing Director of tour operator "maltadirekt Reisen", agree that this 40+ tournament is to evolve into an exclusive and long-lived project taking place in Malta on an annual basis. The 40+ players from Central and Northern Europe have the opportunity to play football outdoors in February and gear up for the spring and summer season. Furthermore, the teams can explore Malta's rich culture, history and beauty and make new contacts.

Meanwhile, the organisers are already planning the 2018 edition of the event and have already received various requests from Austria and Germany, indicating the wide interest in this international 40+ tournament.