

# 265 million playing football

A large-scale FIFA survey involving its then 207 member associations shows that football has strengthened its position as the world's number one sport since the last Big Count in the year 2000. Among the most pleasing signs is the continuing growth of the women's game.

BY MATTHIAS KUNZ



The success of FIFA's diverse investments in the worldwide development of football seems to be leaving its mark not only with increasing match attendances and TV audiences but, according to the latest statistics, also in the number of people around the globe actually playing the game. 265 million male and female players in addition to 5 million referees and officials make a grand total of 270

million people – or 4% of the world's population – who are actively involved in the game of football. These are the impressive findings of the 2006 Big Count, a FIFA survey of its then 207 member associations, which, after being conducted for the first time in 2000, was repeated last year under the same conditions and offers an interesting insight into the development of football worldwide.

The associations were asked to provide FIFA with as many accurate figures as possible in terms of professional footballers, registered players over the age of 18, registered youth players under the age of 18, futsal players, beach soccer players and unregistered occasional players as well as referees and officials. All of these groups were then broken down by gender. In addition, FIFA requested details on the number

of clubs and teams that came under each association's jurisdiction. Three-quarters of FIFA member associations participated in the survey, a similar response to that for the 2000 Big Count, thus making meaningful evaluation a realistic proposition. Although the quality of information submitted by the associations has increased significantly in comparison with the study in 2000, close analysis places a question

mark over the accuracy of some of the details.

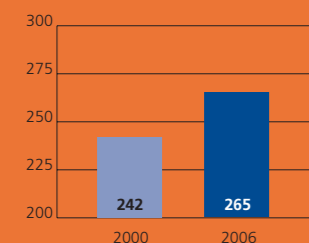
For example, it was hard for the associations to estimate the number of unregistered occasional players because, by definition, no reliable details were available in this regard. FIFA used Big Count 2000, a UEFA survey from 2005 and other internal statistics to supplement missing or implausible data from associations. The study was also

scientifically monitored by a leading social studies organisation.

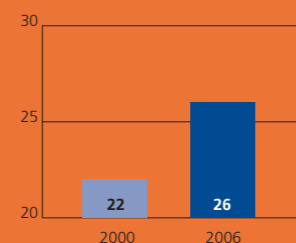
## WOMEN ON THE UP

Football's development in terms of numbers is demonstrated most strikingly with the figures for registered players, because the associations are able to provide very precise data in this respect. It is pleasing to note that today, with 38 million players, 24% more people play

Big Count 2006  
Total players  
(in millions)

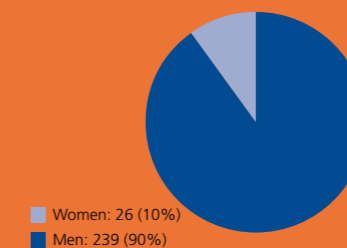


Big Count 2006  
Female players  
(in millions)



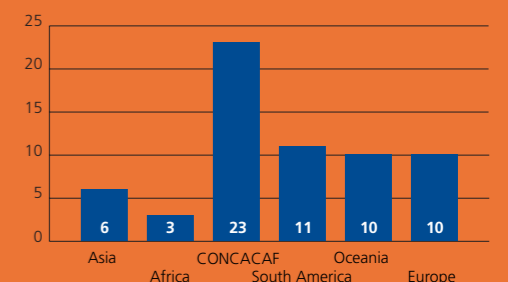
No doubt about it: the number of men and women playing football is expanding the world over.

Big Count 2006  
Distribution by gender  
(in millions and %)



Boom in CONCACAF: 23 per cent of all women players come from this confederation.

Big Count 2006  
Female players (in % of total)





**TOTAL NO. OF PLAYERS** (in 1000s)

1 Chinese Football Association (CHN)	26,166
2 US Soccer Federation (USA)	24,473
3 All India Football Federation (IND)	20,588
4 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	16,309
5 Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (BRA)	13,198
6 Federación Mexicana de Fútbol Asociación, A.C. (MEX)	8,480
7 Football Association of Indonesia (IDN)	7,094
8 Nigeria Football Association (NGA)	6,654
9 Bangladesh Football Federation (BAN)	6,280
10 Football Union of Russia (RUS)	5,803

**TOTAL NO. OF PLAYERS** (in % of population)

1 Federación Costarricense de Fútbol (CRC)	27
2 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	20
3 The Faroe Islands Football Association (FRO)	17
4 Federación Nacional de Fútbol de Guatemala (GUA)	16
5 Federación de Fútbol de Chile (CHI)	16
6 Asociación Paraguaya de Fútbol (PAR)	16
7 Arubaanse Voetbal Bond (ARU)	15
8 Barbados Football Association (BRB)	13
9 Vanuatu Football Federation (VAN)	13
10 Fédération Malienne de Football (MLI)	12

**REGISTERED NO. OF PLAYERS** (in 1000s)

1 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	6,309
2 US Soccer Federation (USA)	4,187
3 Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (BRA)	2,142
4 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	1,795
5 Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (ITA)	1,514
6 The Football Association (ENG)	1,486
7 South African Football Association (RSA)	1,469
8 Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (NED)	1,139
9 Japan Football Association (JPN)	1,045
10 The Canadian Soccer Association (CAN)	866

► under the umbrella of an association than did in 2000. Breaking the results down, the increase in number of registered female players is especially notable: 4.1 million women are now playing football within organised structures, constituting a 54% increase on the 2000 results. This merely goes to substantiate the FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter's prediction that: "The future of football is feminine."

Continuing to look to the future, one especially important statistic that can be drawn from the number of registered players is the proportion made up by youngsters, who constitute 54.7% of all registered male players and as many as 69.6% of the women. The greater number of young players in the women's game is a reflection of the impressive growth in women's football, which has also resulted in a significant increase in the number

of registered amateur players (up 138% compared to 16% in the men's game). These figures clearly indicate that FIFA and its member associations are on the right track to increasing the popularity of football even further in the future.

Interesting conclusions about the development of football in the longer term can be drawn by comparing the latest findings with statistics from 1974, when Dr Joao Havelange was first elected FIFA President and only 140 associations were affiliated to FIFA. In the 33 years since, the number of male and female footballers registered worldwide has more than doubled from 17 million to around 38 million.

In addition to the registered players, who are relatively easy to quantify, the Big Count also includes the many footballers who are not registered with a club but

still take enjoyment from playing the game, in other words, the unregistered occasional players. Assembling some 226 million people, this is the largest category and here too, male footballers make up the lion's share (204 million or 90%), but the growth in the number of unregistered female players since 2000 is far greater than that of their male counterparts (up 14% compared to a 6% increase among the men).

**MORE TEAMS PER CLUB**

Another notable trend is evident in terms of club and team numbers. While the number of clubs – over 300,000 – is much the same as it was in 2000, the number of teams – 1.7 million – has grown by around 12%. Whereas the average club had five teams seven years ago, it now boasts seven. Organised ►



**REGISTERED NO. OF MALE PLAYERS** (in 1000s)

1 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	5,438
2 US Soccer Federation (USA)	2,517
3 Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (BRA)	2,115
4 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	1,746
5 Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (ITA)	1,499
6 South African Football Association (RSA)	1,463
7 The Football Association (ENG)	1,389
8 Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (NED)	1,055
9 Japan Football Association (JPN)	1,000
10 Football Union of Russia (RUS)	835

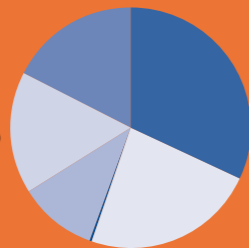
**REGISTERED NO. OF FEMALE PLAYERS** (in 1000s)

1 US Soccer Federation (USA)	1,670
2 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	871
3 The Canadian Soccer Association (CAN)	495
4 Svenska Fotbollförbundet (SWE)	136
5 Football Federation Australia Limited (AUS)	112
6 Norges Fotballforbund (NOR)	98
7 The Football Association (ENG)	97
8 Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (NED)	84
9 Dansk Boldspil-Union (DEN)	56
10 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	49

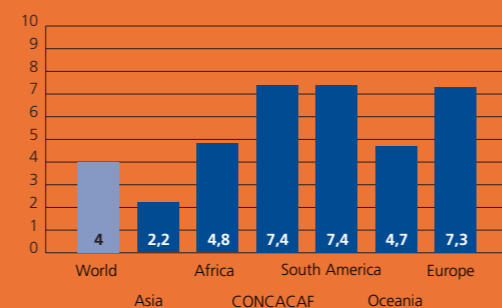
**Asia leads the field among men and women.**

Big Count 2006  
**Players by region**  
(in millions and %)

- Africa (46 = 17%)
- North, Central America & Caribbean (43 = 16%)
- South America (28 = 11%)
- Oceania (0.5 = 0%)
- Europe (62 = 23%)
- Asia (85 = 33%)



Big Count 2006  
**Total players by region** (in % of total population)



Millions are trying to emulate Brazil's national hero Kaká.



DPR Korea's women players have earned a breakthrough into the elite.

PHOTOS: FOTO-NET (2), IMAGO (2)

Big Count: statistical summary report by gender/category/region

In 1000s; sum of rounded values does not always correspond with rounded total. Values proved statistically

	TOTAL	AFC	CAF	CONCACAF	CONMEBOL	OFC	UEFA
Players	264,552	85,176	46,300	43,109	27,778	542	61,647
Male	238,557	80,075	44,940	33,071	24,703	486	55,283
Female	25,995	5,102	1,361	10,038	3074	56	6,364
Referees, Officials	5,058	673	630	1133	168	32	2,422
<b>Total involved in football</b>	<b>269,610</b>	<b>85,849</b>	<b>46,930</b>	<b>44,242</b>	<b>27,946</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>64,069</b>
% of population	4.13	2.22	5.16	8.53	7.47	4.68	7.59
Total population	6,529,791	3,870,439	909,575	518,613	374,235	12,252	844,677

Registered players	38,287	4,040	3,101	6,121	3,759	241	21,025
Professionals	113	11	7	9	25	0	60
Amateurs (18 and over)	15,481	1,531	926	884	980	59	11,101
Youth (under 18)	21,548	2,322	2,156	5,163	2,346	175	9,386
Futsal	1,112	166	10	60	406	7	464
Beach Soccer	33	10	2	5	1	0	14

Unregistered players	226,265	81,136	43,199	36,988	24,018	301	40,622
Company or army teams, schools and universities, street football	104,928	29,131	9,050	25,978	14,199	158	26,412
occasional players, additional estimate	121,337	52,006	34,149	11,010	9,819	143	14,210

Referees, officials	5,058	673	630	1133	168	32	2,422
Referees and assistant referees	843	263	50	172	32	3	322
administrators, coaches, technical and medical staff	4,214	410	580	961	136	29	2,100

Clubs	301	20	12	17	47	2	202
Teams	1,752	145	71	490	162	13	872
Clubs with at least one women's team	26	3	1	7	1	0	13

Big Count: Comparison 2006 – 2000 (in millions, overall totals rounded)

	Big Count 2006	Big Count 2000	+/-
<b>Total players</b>	<b>265</b>	242	+9%
Male players	238.6	220.5	+8
Female players	26.0	21.9	+19
<b>Total players, registered</b>	<b>38</b>	31	+24%
Male players, registered	34.2	28.3	+21
Female players, registered	4.1	2.7	+54
<b>Total players, not registered</b>	<b>226</b>	211	+7%
Male players, not registered	204.4	192.2	+6
Female players, not registered	21.9	19.2	+14
<b>Total youth</b>	<b>22</b>	18	+7%
Male players, youth	18.7	15.8	+18
Female players, youth	2.9	2.2	+32
<b>Total Persons involved in football</b>	<b>270</b>	247	+9%
Total players	264.6	242.4	+9
Total referees	0.84	0.72	+17
Officials	4.2	3.6	+17

► football is therefore growing primarily within existing clubs. Moreover, around 26,000 or 9% of all clubs field at least one women's team.

**FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

As the information for Big Count was gathered by the associations, it is possible for analysis to be conducted not only at national level but also according to confederation. In recent years, the development of football has progressed at very different speeds in the various continents. As regards actual numbers, Asia with 85 million footballers is well ahead of the other continents (Europe 62 million, Africa 46, North and Central America 43, South America 28, Oceania 0.5). However, if the number of players is calculated as a proportion of the total population, the CONCACAF and CONMEBOL regions lead the way, both with an active footballing population that makes up 7.4% of the entire population, closely followed by UEFA with 7.3%. These statistics reiterate the special importance of football in Europe and the Americas and show that, in Asia and Oceania in particular, there is definitely room for further development in terms of the number of people playing the game.

The confederations that show the highest growth rates are UEFA, CONMEBOL and CAF. In each of these three regions, the number of active players

has grown by more than 10% since 2000, with women's football (which, in Africa in particular, had been in very much a fledgling state back then) recording especially positive development.

**WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

The 2006 Big Count clearly underlines the ongoing growth in the popularity of football worldwide. The increasing interest in the game, particularly among women and at youth level, bears witness to the hard work undertaken by FIFA and its 207 member associations of late. This development work already appears to have borne fruit but the potential is far from being exploited to the full. By staging the first FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in New Zealand next year, FIFA is taking another step to take the game to the world. The game's development in Africa is a further reason for excitement, but can football on the African continent hit new heights thanks to the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ in South Africa? All will be revealed in the next Big Count. ■

*Note from the editor: the August issue of FIFA magazine will contain comprehensive details of the Big Count including information from all of FIFA's member associations.*

**TOTAL YOUTH** (in 1000s)

1 US Soccer Federation (USA)	3,907
2 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	2,082
3 Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (BRA)	1,347
4 South African Football Association (RSA)	1,300
5 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	1,034
6 The Football Association (ENG)	820
7 The Canadian Soccer Association (CAN)	716
8 Football Federation of Ukraine (UKR)	659
9 Japan Football Association (JPN)	629
10 Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (ITA)	557

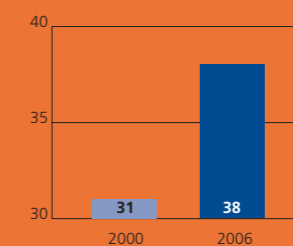
**MALE YOUTH** (in 1000s)

1 US Soccer Federation (USA)	2,344
2 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	1,845
3 Confederação Brasileira de Futebol (BRA)	1,345
4 South African Football Association (RSA)	1,300
5 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	1,006
6 The Football Association (ENG)	750
7 Football Federation of Ukraine (UKR)	658
8 Japan Football Association (JPN)	604
9 Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (ITA)	554
10 Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (NED)	467

**FEMALE YOUTH** (in 1000s)

1 US Soccer Federation (USA)	1,563
2 The Canadian Soccer Association (CAN)	407
3 Deutscher Fussball-Bund (GER)	237
4 Svenska Fotbollförbundet (SWE)	107
5 Football Federation Australia Limited (AUS)	84
6 Norges Fotballforbund (NOR)	83
7 The Football Association (ENG)	70
8 Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (NED)	43
9 Dansk Boldspil-Union (DEN)	42
10 Fédération Française de Football (FRA)	28

Big Count 2006 Registered players (in millions)



Big Count 2006 Referees (in 1,000s)

