

“UEFA’s Nations League offers hope for football’s elite”

We have to accept the new tournament or internationals are doomed to be boring, argues [Chay Quinn](#)

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Image: Nazionale Calcio

“International break” is one of the most ubiquitously irritating phrases in football. All it means is ten days in which we can’t see our clubs in the far-superior Premier League. This for a bunch of poor-quality qualifiers if we’re lucky. If not, we get a dreadful friendly against a side of which the only notable quality is that their star striker is a big oaf (no disrespect to Jon Parkin) who works as a postman.

I’ve seen some terrible friendlies as an England fan. Watching the Three Lions draw 0-0 against Honduras is a personal lowlight. This is not in the spirit of international football and the Nations League offers some chance to make “international break” a term of some excitement, rather than something to bemoan. Perhaps it may even offer a respite from some of the drek that has made its way into the England squad in these friendlies (paying £60 to watch Caulker and Shawcross play in defence isn’t my idea of quality).

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football can be re-established. Segregation of the best from the rest is the way forward. The tiered system that this new competition offers a way to keep the best together but also allows more opportunities for sides on the cusp to break into this tier. Currently, the World Cup and European Championships offer this chance once every two years but the frequency and scheduling of this new tournament give nations another chance to be judged.

For the elite sides, a chance to measure themselves against the best. For the rest, an ability to qualify for the major tournaments or make advances to become elite themselves. For England, more opportunities to get shown up by Montenegro. If this system had been introduced sooner, perhaps this Croatia side (a side that has been of great quality for half a decade) may have got the recognition it secured this summer considerably earlier. Rather than the last hurrah for Modric and co, this team may have stood a better chance to get their recognition when history's forgetful eye is cast glosses over this time. Sadly, I fear they will be forgotten.



Perhaps Croatia would have had more sustained success if the shorter cycle that the Nations League creates was introduced earlier?
Image: Russian Presidential Press and Information Office

The true merit of the Nations League will be assessed at the next European Championships and in Qatar. If the quality of the continent-wide tournament's third-and-fourth seeds can hold their own and not go down without so much as a whimper (again) then this new format will be a consummate success. The Nations League may even provide the tonic for the tournament's existential problem: the difference in quality between qualified teams. Qualification for these tournaments is in dire straits currently. When Italy and Holland miss out but Panama make it in, you know there's a problem.

But all this progress is damaged when nay-sayer journalists continue to criticise the format simply because they haven't the patience nor the adaptability to understand its complexity. They need to realise what this change in format offers: a respite from the tedium of international friendlies and hope that the major tournaments will return to the consistent quality that many of the previous European Championships lacked. Or would they rather watch another droll, inconsequential bore-draw? And let's be honest, we will still go ballistic if England wins it...



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