

THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIFA WORLD CUP AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

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Abstract

This article examines the increase in the number of participants in the FIFA World Cup and its impact on the development of international football. The expansion of the tournament from 32 to 48 national teams represents not only a structural change in the competition format, but also a broader transformation in global football policy, sporting equality, competitive opportunities and national football development. The new format creates wider access for countries from different confederations, especially those that previously had limited chances to qualify for the final stage of the tournament. From a sports-pedagogical point of view, this process increases the importance of long-term football training, youth selection, physical preparation, tactical literacy and psychological readiness of players. The article analyzes how the expanded World Cup format may influence the development of football infrastructure, coaching systems, national leagues and international experience exchange. Special attention is paid to the relevance of this issue for countries seeking to strengthen their position in world football, including the need to improve youth football schools, sports education programs and scientific-methodological approaches to training. The study argues that the increase in the number of World Cup participants can become an important factor in democratizing international football, stimulating regional competition and motivating developing football nations to invest more consistently in player development, coaching quality and modern sports technologies.

Keywords: FIFA World Cup, international football, 48-team format, football development, sports competition, youth football, national teams, sports training, football infrastructure, coaching methodology.

Introduction

FUTBOL BO‘YICHA JAHON CHEMPIONATI ISHTIROKCHILARI SONINING OSHISHI VA UNING XALQARO SPORT RIVOJIGA TA’SIRI

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada futbol bo'yicha Jahon chempionati ishtirokchilari sonining oshishi va uning xalqaro futbol rivojiga ta'siri tahlil qilinadi. Turnir formatining 32 terma jamoadan 48 terma jamoaga kengaytirilishi nafaqat musobaqa tuzilmasidagi o'zgarish, balki global futbol siyosati, sport tengligi, raqobat imkoniyatlari va milliy futbol tizimlari rivojida muhim jarayon sifatida baholanadi. Yangi format turli konfederatsiyalarga mansub davlatlar uchun Jahon chempionatining final bosqichida ishtirok etish imkoniyatlarini kengaytiradi, ayniqsa avval bunday imkoniyati cheklangan futbol mamlakatlari uchun yangi istiqbollar yaratadi. Sport-pedagogik nuqtai nazardan bu jarayon uzoq muddatli futbol tayyorgarligi, yosh futbolchilarni saralash, jismoniy tayyorgarlik, taktik savodxonlik va psixologik barqarorlikning ahamiyatini oshiradi. Maqolada kengaytirilgan Jahon chempionati formati futbol infratuzilmasi, murabbiylik tizimi, milliy ligalar va xalqaro tajriba almashinuviga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishi yoritiladi. Shuningdek, jahon futbolida o'z o'rnini mustahkamlashga intilayotgan mamlakatlar uchun yoshlar futbol maktablari, sport ta'limi dasturlari va ilmiy-uslubiy tayyorgarlikni takomillashtirish zarurligi asoslanadi. Tadqiqotda ishtirokchilar sonining oshishi xalqaro futbolni demokratlashtirish, mintaqaviy

raqobatni kuchaytirish hamda rivojlanayotgan futbol mamlakatlarini futbolchi tayyorlash, murabbiylar malakasi va zamonaviy sport texnologiyalariga ko'proq e'tibor qaratishga undovchi omil sifatida talqin qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar: FIFA Jahon chempionati, xalqaro futbol, 48 jamoali format, futbol rivoji, sport raqobati, yoshlar futboli, terma jamoalar, sport tayyorgarligi, futbol infratuzilmasi, murabbiylik metodikasi.

Introduction

The FIFA World Cup has always been more than a football tournament. It is a global social, cultural, economic and pedagogical phenomenon that influences the development of sport in almost every region of the world. The decision to increase the number of participating national teams from 32 to 48 beginning with the 2026 FIFA World Cup marks one of the most significant structural changes in the modern history of international football. According to FIFA, the 2026 tournament will include 48 teams and 104 matches, making it the largest World Cup in history. ([ФИФА](#)) This expansion changes not only the competitive format of the tournament, but also the strategic direction of football development at national, regional and international levels.

For many decades, participation in the World Cup final stage was limited to a relatively small number of countries. Strong football nations from Europe and South America traditionally dominated the tournament, while many teams from Asia, Africa, North America and other regions faced serious difficulties in qualification. The expansion of the tournament creates broader opportunities for national teams that have been developing their football systems but have not always been able to reach the final stage. This is especially important for countries where football is popular among young people, but where professional infrastructure, coaching systems, youth academies and international competitive experience still require further development.

From the perspective of a pedagogical university and sports education, the expanded World Cup format is important because it increases the need for systematic preparation of football players from an early age. When more national teams receive the chance to participate in the World Cup, the role of youth football, physical education, talent identification, tactical training, psychological readiness and coaching methodology becomes even more significant. Football

development can no longer be viewed only as the responsibility of professional clubs or national federations. It must also be connected with schools, universities, sports colleges, community clubs and scientific-methodological research in physical education.

The increase in the number of participants may also influence the competitive environment of international football. On the one hand, it gives developing football nations more motivation to invest in long-term programs, improve national leagues and strengthen coach education. On the other hand, it raises questions about tournament quality, match intensity, player workload and the balance between sporting fairness and commercial interests. Since the 2026 tournament will have 104 matches instead of the previous 64-match structure, the physical and psychological burden on players, coaches and organizing systems becomes an important issue for analysis. ([ФИФА](#))

For Uzbekistan and other developing football countries, this process has practical relevance. The expansion of the World Cup demonstrates that international football is becoming more inclusive and more open to countries that are ready to modernize their training systems. It encourages national football structures to focus on children's football, youth academies, women's football, sports science, analytics, medical support and modern pedagogical approaches. Therefore, the study of the increase in World Cup participants is not only a matter of tournament organization, but also a question of how global football development can stimulate national sports education, professional training and the preparation of future generations of football players.

Methods

The study was conducted on the basis of a qualitative analytical approach aimed at examining the relationship between the expansion of the FIFA World Cup format and the development of international football. Since the topic is connected with organizational changes, sports policy, competitive balance and pedagogical aspects of football preparation, the research method was designed to combine theoretical analysis, comparative observation and content-based interpretation of existing football development tendencies. The main purpose of the methodological approach was to identify how the increase in the number of participating teams may affect national football systems, youth training, coaching methodology, competitive motivation and the internationalization of football.

The first stage of the research involved the analysis of official information related to the structure of the FIFA World Cup, especially the transition from the 32-team format to the expanded 48-team format. This allowed the study to determine the main characteristics of the new tournament model and to understand its potential influence on football federations, national teams and regional confederations. Special attention was paid to the fact that a larger number of teams creates broader qualification opportunities for countries from different continents. From the methodological point of view, this factor was considered as an indicator of increasing inclusiveness in international football.

The second stage was based on comparative analysis. The previous World Cup format was compared with the new expanded format in terms of access, competition, preparation requirements and possible consequences for football development. The comparison made it possible to evaluate not only the numerical increase in participants, but also the qualitative changes that may occur in the training process of national teams. In particular, the study considered how more accessible participation in the World Cup may encourage countries to develop football academies, improve national championships, raise the professional level of coaches and introduce modern sports technologies into training.

The third stage focused on the pedagogical and methodological aspects of football development. Since the audience of the article is connected with sports education, the research examined the issue from the point of view of physical education, youth sport and long-term athlete development. The study considered football preparation as a continuous pedagogical process that includes physical, technical, tactical, psychological and social components. In this context, the expansion of the World Cup was interpreted as a factor that may increase the demand for qualified coaches, systematic selection of talented players and scientifically grounded training programs.

The fourth stage used logical generalization and analytical synthesis. Information obtained from the analysis of tournament changes, international football tendencies and sports-pedagogical principles was summarized in order to identify the main expected results. The study did not rely on experimental measurements or statistical testing with athletes, because the subject is mainly organizational and developmental in nature. Instead, the research used a descriptive-analytical method that is appropriate for examining policy changes, structural reforms and their possible influence on sport development.

The methodological limitation of the study is that the full practical consequences of the 48-team World Cup format can be evaluated more accurately after several tournaments are held under the new system. However, the current analysis makes it possible to predict the main directions of influence on international football. The chosen methodology allows the article to connect global football changes with the needs of sports education, youth development and national football progress.

Results

The analysis shows that the increase in the number of FIFA World Cup participants from 32 to 48 teams has the potential to create several important changes in the development of international football. The first major result is the expansion of access to the highest level of global competition. A larger tournament format gives more national teams an opportunity to participate in the final stage of the World Cup. This is especially significant for countries from regions that previously had fewer qualification places. As a result, the World Cup becomes not only a competition among traditional football powers, but also a wider platform for the representation of different football cultures, training systems and regional styles of play.

The second important result is connected with the motivation of developing football nations. When the possibility of qualifying for the World Cup becomes more realistic, national football federations receive a stronger reason to invest in long-term development programs. This may include the improvement of children's and youth football schools, the modernization of football infrastructure, the creation of stronger domestic leagues, and the professional development of coaches. For many countries, the expanded World Cup can serve as a strategic target that encourages systematic work rather than short-term preparation. In this sense, the tournament format may indirectly influence the quality of football education and athlete development.

The third result is the expected growth of competition within regional confederations. Since more teams can qualify, more countries will consider themselves real candidates for participation in the World Cup. This may increase the intensity of qualification matches and make regional tournaments more competitive. Countries that previously had little chance of qualification may now approach international matches with higher motivation. Such a process can

positively affect football culture, fan interest, media attention and financial support for football development. At the same time, stronger competition within regions may help national teams gain more international experience before reaching the World Cup.

The fourth result relates to youth football and sports pedagogy. The expanded World Cup format increases the importance of early talent identification and long-term preparation. National teams cannot be built only at the senior level. Their success depends on the quality of football education provided from childhood and adolescence. Therefore, football schools, sports clubs, physical education institutions and pedagogical universities may play a greater role in preparing future players and coaches. The development of technical skills, tactical thinking, endurance, discipline, teamwork and psychological stability becomes more important in a more competitive international environment.

The fifth result concerns possible challenges. Although the expanded format creates broader opportunities, it may also bring certain risks. One of them is the possibility of unequal match quality, especially if teams with very different levels of preparation meet in the group stage. Another challenge is the increased number of matches, which may raise the physical workload of players during the tournament season. Coaches and medical staff will need to pay more attention to recovery, injury prevention, rotation and psychological fatigue. In addition, the organization of a larger tournament requires stronger logistical, technological and administrative systems.

Overall, the results indicate that the expansion of the FIFA World Cup can become a positive factor for international football development if it is supported by effective national programs. The increase in participants should not be viewed only as a numerical change. It should be understood as a process that influences football policy, youth training, coaching standards, infrastructure, competition and global sporting equality. For developing football countries, including those seeking to strengthen their international position, the new format offers both opportunities and responsibilities.

Discussion

The expansion of the FIFA World Cup to a larger number of participating teams should be understood as a complex process that affects not only the tournament itself, but also the wider system of international football. In the modern sports

environment, football development depends on many connected factors, including infrastructure, coaching quality, youth academies, national championships, sports science, medical support, financial investment and international experience. Therefore, the increase in the number of World Cup participants may become an important stimulus for countries that want to improve their football systems and become more competitive at the global level.

One of the main advantages of the expanded format is that it makes international football more inclusive. For a long time, the World Cup was dominated by a relatively limited group of countries with strong football traditions. Although this helped maintain a high competitive level, it also limited the chances of many developing football nations. The 48-team format gives more countries an opportunity to take part in the final stage and represent their region, football culture and national identity. This can strengthen the global popularity of football and increase the motivation of young players who dream of representing their country at the highest level.

From a pedagogical point of view, this change creates new requirements for the preparation of football players. If more national teams have realistic chances to qualify for the World Cup, then football development must begin from the earliest stages of education and training. Children's football, school sport, university sport and professional academies should be connected within one consistent system. Coaches need to develop not only technical skills, but also tactical thinking, physical endurance, communication, discipline and psychological stability. In this context, pedagogical universities and sports education institutions play an important role in preparing qualified specialists who can work with young football players according to modern scientific principles.

The expansion also increases the importance of football planning at the national level. Countries that want to use the new opportunities effectively must not rely only on individual talented players. They need systematic programs for talent identification, coach education, sports medicine, analytics and competition experience. National federations should cooperate with educational institutions, clubs and regional training centers. Such cooperation can help create a more stable football development model. For Uzbekistan, this issue is also relevant because the country has strong interest in football, many talented young players and increasing attention to sports infrastructure. The expanded World Cup format

may encourage further improvement of youth football schools, coaching methods and international cooperation.

At the same time, the new format brings certain challenges. A larger tournament may create differences in team quality, especially in the early stages of competition. Some critics may argue that increasing the number of participants can reduce the sporting level of the tournament. However, this risk can be minimized if developing countries use the opportunity to strengthen their training systems before reaching the World Cup. Another challenge is the physical workload of players. More matches mean greater demands on recovery, rotation, injury prevention and psychological readiness. This makes sports science and medical-pedagogical support even more important.

Overall, the increase in the number of FIFA World Cup participants can be evaluated as a positive and progressive change if it is connected with real football development. The expanded format should not be seen only as a commercial or organizational decision. It can become a mechanism for spreading football knowledge, improving regional competition, strengthening youth training and increasing the role of sport education in national development. For countries that are ready to invest in systematic preparation, the new format offers a valuable opportunity to enter the global football arena and contribute to the diversity of international football.

Conclusion

The increase in the number of participants in the FIFA World Cup is one of the most important changes in modern international football. The transition from the traditional 32-team format to the expanded 48-team format reflects the growing global character of football and the need to create broader opportunities for countries from different regions. This change is not only a matter of increasing the number of matches or participating teams. It represents a new stage in the development of world football, where inclusiveness, regional representation, competitive motivation and long-term sports development become central issues. The expanded format can have a positive influence on countries that have not always had stable access to the final stage of the World Cup. For developing football nations, participation in such a tournament is not only a sporting achievement, but also a powerful stimulus for improving national football systems. It encourages football federations, clubs, coaches and educational

institutions to pay more attention to youth training, infrastructure, tactical education, physical preparation and psychological readiness. When the possibility of qualifying for the World Cup becomes more realistic, the motivation to invest in football development becomes stronger and more practical.

From the point of view of sports pedagogy, the increase in the number of World Cup participants creates new tasks for the training of young football players. Modern football requires not only technical skills, but also tactical thinking, endurance, teamwork, discipline, emotional stability and the ability to adapt to different styles of play. Therefore, football preparation must be organized as a continuous educational and training process. Children's football schools, sports clubs, pedagogical universities and national training centers should work together to prepare players who can compete at the international level.

The expansion of the World Cup also strengthens the importance of coach education. A national team's success depends not only on talented players, but also on the professional competence of coaches, analysts, fitness specialists, psychologists and medical staff. In this regard, sports education institutions have an important role in developing qualified specialists for the football system. The wider international format requires a more scientific approach to training, recovery, injury prevention, player selection and match analysis.

At the same time, the expanded format brings certain challenges. The increase in the number of matches may increase the physical and psychological workload of players. There may also be differences in the competitive level of participating teams. However, these challenges should not be viewed only negatively. They show that national football systems must become more organized, more scientific and more responsible. Countries that use the new format as an opportunity for systematic development can benefit greatly from this change.

In general, the increase in the number of participants in the FIFA World Cup can contribute to the democratization and globalization of football. It gives more nations the chance to represent themselves on the world stage, increases interest in football among young people and encourages the development of modern training systems. For countries such as Uzbekistan, this process is especially important because it creates motivation to improve youth football, strengthen coaching methodology and develop international competitiveness. Therefore, the expanded World Cup format should be considered not only as a tournament

reform, but also as a factor that can influence the future development of international football.

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