



PRESS RELEASE - : "One Ball, One World." : Kick-Off, Battersea Park, Sunday 25 March 2018, 10am onwards

"The Ball 2018" - Football's Olympic Torch – is getting ready to for its fifth journey to the FIFA World Cup. In 2002, 2006, 2010 & 2014, "The Ball" touched people in communities in over 50 countries across 5 continents. The Ball 2018 kicks off where every journey of The Ball has started – the place where the very first official game of FA Rules football was played in 1864: Battersea Park in London.

The original match was followed by a concert at which Association Football was launched with the toast "Success to football, irrespective of class or creed". This shows that, from its very founding moment, football was based on the notions of inclusion and participation. We believe that this is an important message – perhaps more so today than ever.

The centrepiece of the kick-off event is always a game of football. The founding principles of fair play and respect should not only be a part of every game but can be a way of life. The Ball's 2018 destination is the FIFA World Cup in Russia and will, en route, visit 19 countries and celebrate football's unique capacity to bring people together and to do good.

There are a few reasons to celebrate the game on 9th January 1864. Firstly, it was the first official game of football in which the first ever goals were scored. The Ball kick-off is always followed by an exhibition match using the original rules. When those rules were written there were no referees – it was inconceivable that gentlemen couldn't resolve a dispute amongst themselves!

Spirit of Football is excited to partner with the Robert Bosch Foundation on this epic journey with the goal of strengthening Europe through football. The Ball will be welcomed into Jordan by HRH Prince Ali on 18th May, visiting Syrian refugee camps in Jordan and running integration workshops with Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon and Turkey. It will bring participants from previously warring nations together in Kosovo and be kicked and signed by homeless people in Croatia. It will also seek the Olympic Spirit and a blessing from the Greek Gods at the top of Mount Olympus with football fans in Greece. Education workshops will be run in learning centres in 10 German Bundesliga stadiums, ending with an attempt to enter Russia via Georgia.

The first person to sign The Ball, officially unveiling and launching it in December 2017, was the President of Germany, Frank Walter Steinmeier. The official kick-off of The Ball 2018 will take place at noon on Sunday 25th March in Battersea Park, London. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation are supporting this event and The Ball will be joined by children from Sacred Heart Primary School Battersea and St. Mary's Battersea, Queen Mary University of London Students' Union (QMSU), Kick It Out Kick, football's equality and inclusion organisation, alongside a host of others, from 10am. Members of the band New Model Army, whose theme song "Spirit of the Beautiful Game" will be the soundtrack to the journey, will play in the kick-off match.



Activities including fair-play football and fair-play theatre will be run by Spirit of Football's education team from Germany.

For the first time, a "Sister Ball" will showcase the Equal Playing Field campaign. Women's sport remains underrepresented, under-supported and undervalued. In many cultures, women are forbidden from playing sport at all. The Ball's journey in 2018 would like to highlight women's football in various countries en route to Russia, including the Spirit of Football's "One Ball, One World" project supported by the German Foreign Ministry, in the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan. Members of Equal Playing Field will be at Battersea Park for the kick-off and will take a replica ball immediately afterwards to Jordan, for use in the lowest football match ever played taking place at the Dead Sea on April 5th 2018.

The journey is once again supported by Jürgen Klopp, who The Ball will be visiting at Liverpool FC in the days after kick-off. Jürgen's statement of support talks about the importance of teamwork and inclusion: "Whoever sees my signature on The Ball can feel a bit better for a moment because he knows that he is surrounded by friends, and when he too signs it, he becomes a member of our team. I would be happy if you too would join our team." Spirit of Football's aim is for as many people as possible to sign The Ball 2018 en route to Russia.

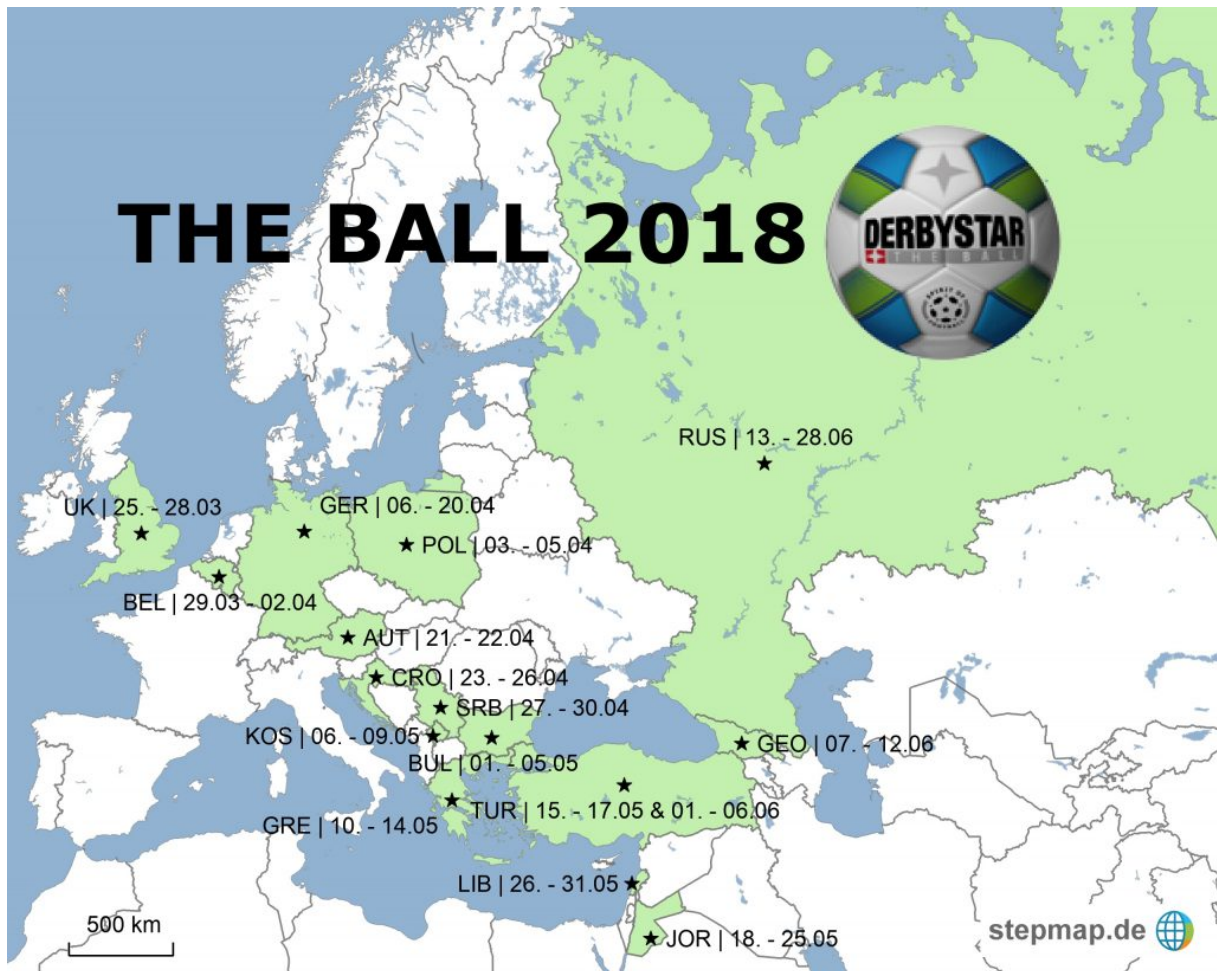
The Ball 2018, following the example of fairly-made balls of 2010 and 2014, is a Fairtrade ball. It was hand made by our ball-partner Derbystar, travelling with a message given to it by Special Olympics in Lagos, Nigeria in 2010 that captures the spirit of football perfectly: "One Ball, One World." The Ball journeys are the fair play DNA of Spirit of Football and the origins of modern football are also rooted in this spirit.

Here are some links for sharing via social media:

The Ball 2014 - a short emotionally charged video of The Ball's epic journey through 25 countries to Brazil: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRy_bTAPduo

For more information about all of The Ball journeys so far: <http://theball.tv/>

The German President Frank Walter Steinmeier unveils „The Ball“ in December 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRUOZnafGSQ>



Here are the more exact locations and dates of The Ball 2018:

- England – kick-off 25th March
- Belgium – 29th March to 2nd of April
- Poland – 3rd to 5th of April
- Germany – 6th to 20th of April
- Austria – 21st to 22nd of April
- Croatia – 23rd to 26th of April
- Serbia – 27th to 30th of April
- Bulgaria – 1st to 5th of May
- Kosovo – 6th to 9th of May
- Greece – 10th to 14th of May
- Turkey (Istanbul) – 15th to 17th of May
- Jordan – 18th to 25th of May
- Lebanon – 26th to 31st of May
- Turkey – 1st to 6th of June
- Georgia – 7th to 12th of June
- Russia – 13th of June to 7th of July



Kick-off timetable

Time	What
10am - 10:10	Welcome talk: SOF fair play rules to school children
10:15 - 11:45	Five-a-side mixed children's games, fair play rules
11:45 - 12.00 wind-down	Give children certificates etc
12:00 – 12:30	Speeches, VIP, photos, press etc
12:45 onwards	Kick off