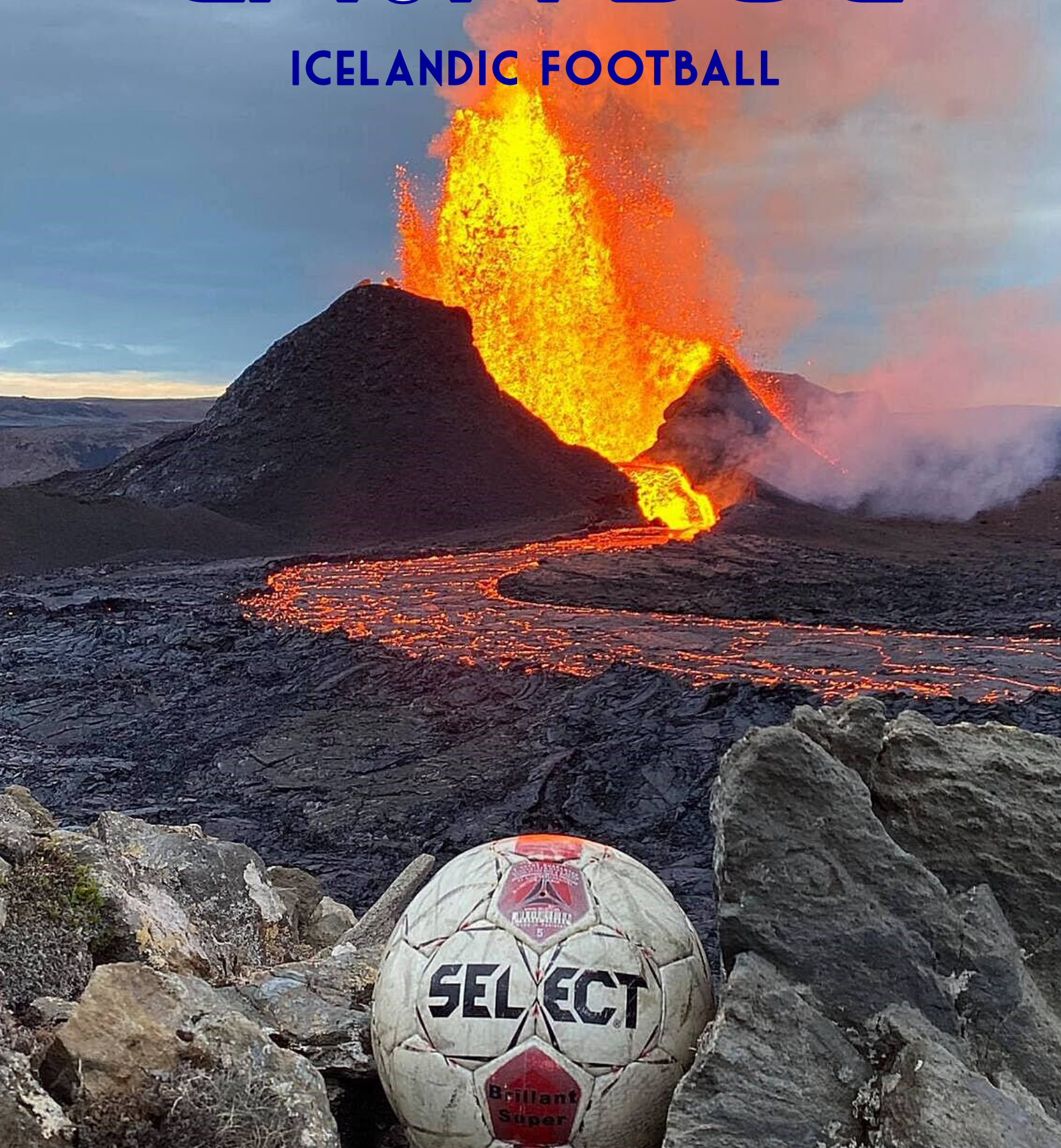


LAVA BOL

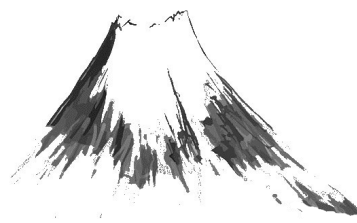
ICELANDIC FOOTBALL



MARC BOAL

Football - Photography - Culture - Landscapes

LAVA BOL



Football - Photography - Culture - Landscapes

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to the management of IA Akranes, IBV, KFS Vestmannaeyjar and Hamar Hveragerdi for their time, hospitality and warm welcome I received when visiting their respective clubs, and for their insight and suggestions while gathering content for this book. Huge thanks also to Andrzej Piotr Boguniecki, Kristján Ingimarsson, Arngrímur Baldursson, Haraldur Haraldsson, Christopher Harrington, Valgeir Sigurðsson, Raggi Ola, Hanna Símonardóttir and Kevin Sinclair for submitting additional photography. I will be forever grateful to Sverrir Eiriksson and Eliza Spruntule who were always on hand to taxi me to some obscure locations so I could shoot the photos I required to complete this publication.



ISBN:

All material in this book, including both text and images, is protected by copyright. Replication via republishing in any print or digital form requires consent from the author.

Contents

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Pepsi-Max Deildin
- ◆ KFS Vestmannaeyjar
- ◆ Top Grounds
- ◆ KM Reykjavik
- ◆ North - South - East - West
- ◆ Reykjavik Derby
- ◆ Youth football
- ◆ Iceland & Culture
- ◆ Seydisfjardarvollur
- ◆ Vestri
- ◆ IA Akranes
- ◆ Financial Imbalance
- ◆ Hamar Hveragerdi
- ◆ UMF Afturelding
- ◆ Tolfan
- ◆ Landscapes
- ◆ Laugardalsvollur
- ◆ Full-Time

ICELAND - A natural wonderland where the freezing forces of glaciers and arctic weather are in a permanent battle with earth's explosive heat. A country which is regarded by many as the final frontier of Western Europe.

There was always a plan in place, whilst travelling across this stunningly beautiful country, to publish a book which optimises the ruggedness and serene beauty of this volcanic island. This publication has been seven years in the making, going through a memory bank of thousands of photos specially handpicked to characterise the essence of Icelandic football.

The Iceland national team, and their supporters, burst onto the international scene in 2015 when they upset the odds and qualified for their first ever major championship (Euro 2016). Iceland's underdog tag captured the admiration of football aficionados from all over the world. Football has overtaken taken handball as the number one sport in the country, it goes hand in hand with many Icelanders as part of their everyday life. The Iceland national team mantra for many years was "win at all costs" - this has changed dramatically in the past couple of decades as football continues to evolve and the sport becomes increasingly more technical. There is a real obsession for the beautiful game, especially within the older generation of Icelanders. I've had countless conversations about past Scottish players that they still hold fond memories of, ranging from: Danny McGrain's beard; the Scottish national team's drinking exploits (in 1975) after a match against Denmark in Copenhagen; and reminiscing about the cuts and injuries sustained during matches on frozen gravel pitches - which were also prominent in Scotland many years ago when I was still playing the game!

Travelling through the north of Iceland created one of my lasting memories - a footballing odyssey, almost like being caught at the tip of an edge-of-the-world time warp, visiting some of the most obscure clubs in the country, from Isafjordur to Husavik. The scenery was extraordinary as blankets of freezing fog rolled in from the arctic, and intermittent breaks in the haze revealed colossal ice-covered mountains, cascading waterfalls, and alien-like rock formations, created a scene that is now seared into my soul. Sitting in a remote petrol station café, in the middle of nowhere, while embracing a steaming hot coffee (map in hand) and planning an itinerary of the matches and stadiums I intended to visit was part of the exhilarating experience. You'll need a strong spine, or a 4x4 with good suspension, for the bone-crunching gravel roads which you will encounter if you wander off the main ring-road which runs the length of the country and connects most of the inhabited towns. While Reykjavik, and the surrounding south-west confines, is home to almost half the population, the rest of the inhabitants are spread between a series of small towns, villages and hamlets dotted around the rugged, windswept coastline. One thing to keep in mind is Iceland's everchanging weather, even in the summer months always have a plan B in place!

Iceland is a country like no other - the clubs are a beacon of light to the surrounding communities, and they are very welcoming to football fans from abroad. Football tourism is big business in central European countries, however, Iceland is a groundhoppers paradise as many fans will get the bug, after the first visit, and take up an infinity with a certain domestic club; this has been evident over the past few years as travellers to the country have started the formation of supporters' clubs on social media. Since my first publication in 2015, I have covered just about every angle of Icelandic football, therefore, it is now time for an indefinite hiatus from writing and publishing. If you like a little adventure with your football - Iceland is a country that will seduce you with its incredible landscapes. I hope this book and photography will inspire fans of the beautiful game, from around Europe and beyond, to come and visit some of the most tranquil grounds on the planet.



VIKINGUR
LEIKNIR REYKJAVIK
KEFLAVIK
KR REYKJAVIK
FRAM
BREIDABLIK



FH HAFNARFJORDUR
IA AKRANES

VALUR
KA AKUREYRI
HK KOPAVOGUR
STJARNAN



Knattspyrnufélagið Valur – Founded 1911. Honours: Icelandic Champions 23, Icelandic Cup 11.

Stadium – Origovollur: 2,500. Colours: Red & White. Kit – Macron

Nickname: Valsmenn. Website: www.valur.is



Knattspyrnufélag Reykjavíkur – Founded 1899. Honours: Icelandic Champions 27, Icelandic Cup 14.

Stadium – Meistaravellir: 4,000. Colours: Black & White stripes. Kit – Nike

Nickname: KR-ingar. Website: www.kr.is



Knattspyrnufélag Akureyrar – Founded 1928. Honours: Icelandic Champions 1, Icelandic Cup 0.

Stadium – Greifavollur: 2,000. Colours: Yellow & Blue. Kit – Errea

Nickname: KA-menn. Website: www.ka.is



Knattspyrnufélagið Víkingur – Founded 1908. Honours: Icelandic Champions 5, Icelandic Cup 2.

Stadium – Víkingsvollur: 2,500. Colours: Red & Black stripes. Kit – Macron

Nickname: Víkes. Website: www.vikingur.is



Knattspyrnudeild Breiðabliks – Founded 1950. Honours: Icelandic Champions 1, Icelandic Cup 1.

Stadium – Kopavogsvollur: 3,000. Colours: Green & White. Kit – Errea

Nickname: Blikar. Website: www.breidablik.is



Fimleikafélag Hafnarfjarðar – Founded 1929. Honours: Icelandic Champions 8, Icelandic Cup 2.

Stadium – Kaplakriki: 6,000. Colours: White & Black. Kit – Nike

Nickname: FH-ingar. Website: www.fh.is



Ungmennafélagið Stjarnan – Founded 1960. Honours: Icelandic Champions 1, Icelandic Cup 1.

Stadium – Samsungvollur: 2,700. Colours: Blue & White. Kit – Uhlsport

Nickname: The Star. Website: www.stjarnan.is



Íþróttafélag ÍBV – Founded 1903. Honours: Icelandic Champions 3, Icelandic Cup 5.

Stadium – Hasteinsvollur: 2,500. Colours: White & Black. Kit – Hummel

Nickname: Eyjamenn. Website: www.ibvsport.is



Knattspyrnudeild Keflavíkur – Founded 1929. Honours: Icelandic Champions 4, Icelandic Cup 4.

Stadium – HS – Orkuvollur: 4,000. Colours: Dark Blue. Kit – Nike

Nickname: Bitlabaerinn. Website: www.keflavik.is



Handknattleiksfélag Kópavogs – Founded 1970. Honours: Icelandic Champions 0, Icelandic Cup 0.

Stadium – Korinn: 1,500. Colours: Red & White hoops. Kit – Macron

Nickname: Innipukar. Website: www.hk.is



Íþróttafélagið Leiknir – Founded 1973. Honours: Icelandic Champions 0, Icelandic Cup 0.

Stadium – Domusnovavollur: 1,500. Colours: Maroon & Blue. Kit – Errea

Nickname: Leiknisljonin. Website: www.leiknir.com



Knattspyrnufélagið FRAM – Founded 1908. Honours: Icelandic Champions 18, Icelandic Cup 8.

Stadium – Framvollur: 3,000. Colours: Blue & White. Kit – Errea

Nickname: Framarar. Website: www.fram@fram.is

PEPSI MAX DEILDIN

There has been little change to the league structure in Iceland since its formation back in 1912, it was not until 1977, when ten teams competed in the top division, that football grew in stature; the format was slightly altered in 2008 as another two clubs were added to make the top-flight a 12-division league. There were motions brought forward at the 2020 KSI AGM to radically restructure the domestic footballing landscape, which failed to pass a legislative vote (mainly due to the smaller clubs who had key votes and vetoed the status quo). Icelandic football is in desperate need of a revamp, there is an opportunity for an open and wide debate, leading to an evidence-based policy response, into how leagues should be restructured, while also considering the preferences of stakeholders and fans who play a vital part. A league that is set up to make the sport more appealing will generate more revenue and ultimately increase attendances which have plummeted in the past few years. In Scotland, attendance figures make up 43% of a club's annual income, in Iceland, that figure is lagging by around 15%. A larger top-flight goes hand in hand with the financial aspect of an inclusive model, which drives out short-termism



and perpetuates a sustainable future. The league pyramid is clearly in need of a shake up, the game has been in limbo for the past few years. Icelandic clubs have struggled in European competition, of late, against higher standard opposition, with many pundits attributing it to the lack of competitive games in the Pepsi Max division. Would a 14-team league, involving a split, be the best way forward? The Pepsi-Max is one of the shortest seasons in world football so extra matches would be welcomed, it would also put an end to meaningless end-of-season games and generate more financial clout to be distributed to clubs. A new 5-year TV deal has been negotiated with Stod 2, running from 2022-2026, it is imperative to rebrand the future of the Icelandic game so that the correct structure is firmly in place. The Governing bodies, and clubs themselves, need to be more responsive and devise a plan to tap into Iceland's booming tourism sector - the halcyon days of national success in 2016 was an excellent opportunity to create more interest for the domestic game via the tourist market, and this still continues to be overlooked!



KFS VESTMANNAEYJAR



How do amateur football clubs operate in the most secluded areas of the country? It was only right to pay a visit to third division outfit KFS Vestmannaeyjar who hail from Heimaey – An island that is famous for its puffin colonies and active volcanoes.



The Vestmannaeyjar archipelago is made up of 15 islands, which consists of 70-80 volcanoes both above and below sea, that lie in the Southern Icelandic volcanic system. Heimaey is the only inhabited island and is home to the tongue twisting KFS Vestmannaeyjar. The island came to international attention in 1973 with the eruption of the Eldfell volcano which destroyed many houses and forced the evacuation of the entire population, apart from a few from the fire department. The ingenuity that was pulled off to save the harbour is legendary; no-one had ever fought an erupting volcano and won – but on Heimaey, in the face of adversity, they did.

On this my 2nd visit, I decided to take the short flight from Reykjavik to Vestmannaeyjar, rather than the ferry, as it would allow me to spend more time on the island. The flight was an experience in itself as upon approach I could see that the runway is situated precariously at the edge of a cliff, with a sheer drop! The first signs of Vestmannaeyjar (population 4,300) began to manifest when the plane descended beneath the cloud cover: jagged peaks and skerries towered out of the vast expanse of sea to reveal the islands turbulent volcanic past; a lone fishing boat made headway through the foggy, perilous Atlantic waters in the hope of finding a big catch. I knew then that photography was going to be difficult during this trip as the whole island was shrouded in coastal sea-haar.

KFS Vestmannaeyjar is a club accustomed to playing in the lower echelons of Icelandic football, however, there has been a remarkable turnaround in the club's fortunes over the past two years. KFS won promotion to 3 deild in 2020 after reaching the 4th division play-off final, they just fell short at the final hurdle of claiming the silverware: KFS were 2-1 up in the final against IH, courtesy of goals from Bjorgvin Geir Bjorvinsson and Borgthor Eydal Arnsteinsson, it looked like the trophy was heading back to the islands but unfortunately, deep into injury time, IH scored an equaliser to take the match into extra-time. IH then fired in the winning goal to give them a 3-2 victory, it was a hammer blow for the young KFS side.

KFS usually play their home games at the panoramic Tysvollur (which is also used as a training pitch by Premier side IBV) they will also use Hasteinsvollur if there is a match of significant importance. Both pitches are located just a few hundred yards from the turbulent Atlantic Ocean: when the wind is blowing off the sea, it can wreak havoc for

players trying to play a decent standard of football as it is not uncommon for matches to either get abandoned or postponed, even in the summer months, due to gales that frequently batter these remote islands. The weather forecast is always being monitored a day or so before a match, especially by visiting clubs, and if the weather is unfavourable then games will be hastily rearranged as heavy sea can cancel the life-line ferry to the island.

This season, during their league assault, it has been the proverbial game of two halves, which has taken the club into uncharted territory. In the early rounds, KFS struggled to get any points on the board, it certainly looked as if the rise in standard to 3 Deild was a step too far, avoiding relegation was the main priority. KFS came out of the firing blocks in the 2nd half of the season with a renewed vigour and went on a 6-game winning streak which propelled the islanders up the table to the safety of a mid-table position. They then went on to cause one of the biggest upsets in Icelandic cup history when they deservedly beat division 1 side Vikingur Olafsvik 4-2, in front of 93 hardy fans at Hasteinsvollur, thanks to a brace from Elmar Erlingsson and Vidir Thorvaldsson.

They were also rewarded with a plum tie for the biggest game in the club's history (in the last 16 of the competition) away to Premier side HK Kopavogur but suffered a heavy 7-1 defeat; Vidir Thorvaldsson grabbed the consolation goal. It has been a remarkable turnaround for Gunnar Heidar Thorvaldsson's well drilled side, this can only bode well after this season's transformation. Defender Hafsteinn Gisli Valdimarsson and winger Frans Sigurdsson were also voted the stand-out players of 3 Deild in matchday 9 and 20 respectively. The future is looking very bright for this secluded club that exists on the periphery of the beautiful game.





The distinctive Hasteinsvollur stadium is situated at the bottom of a huge valley; massive columns of coloured lava formations dominate the backdrop to the ground. In every direction, the breath-taking scenic views, of nature's rugged wonder, gives Hasteinsvollur the acclaim of being one of the most enchanting stadiums in the world football.



Gunnar Heiðar Þorvaldsson



“KFS can be a springboard where players can learn from their mistakes, this is a core principal at the club”

- Gunnar Heiðar Þorvaldsson: Manager, KFS Vestmannaeyjar

Having played abroad for a large part of his football career, most notably with IFK Norrköping and Halmstads BK, former Iceland international Gunnar Heiðar Þorvaldsson returned back to his homeland in 2015 to play for IBV Vestmannaeyjar. The transition from player into management can be a difficult role to fill, however, Gunnar is very upbeat and enjoying his new found love for the game as he explains, “I quit football in 2018, it was all becoming arduous, I was getting fed up, so I decided to spend more time with the family and we done a fair bit of touring and travelling across our beautiful country, it was fine to spend time away from the pitch, revitalise, and focus on family life.”

Gunnar, who was capped 24 times, scoring 5 international goals for his country, is now working as the Development Manager at VSV, (the largest fish processing plant on the island) his commitment as coach to KFS is on a voluntary basis. “It’s a pleasure to take the team and pass on my knowledge to them, it has been a huge learning curve for myself, it is a totally different scenario from being a player to organising a team, it’s a challenge I’m adapting to, I’m learning so much about the managerial process and enjoying the experience, it’s also important to give something back to the community.”

The KFS players will usually train 3 days a week and have a recovery day after a match. The training sessions start very slowly in late September mainly just to keep fitness levels up as winter descends on the island. The foundations are firmly being constructed at KFS, you could feel the passion and desire that Gunnar has for the club as the conversation continued. “I was very vocal about KFS when I was the assistant coach at IBV, but after taking a break from football you become older and wiser, there is no doubt that football is in my DNA. When I played abroad, I noticed so many teams were involved in franchises or collaborations, It is vitally important to give players who are not quite ready to make the advance to the IBV 1st team, game time as they progress as players, or they decide to quit, this has been prominent in recent years with players who are not getting the minutes on the pitch, they just turn their backs on football completely – we need to try and keep players with potential involved in football, KFS can be a springboard where these guys can learn from the mistakes, this is a core principal at the club”

Being an amateur club, no players at KFS get paid a wage, they are only playing for the love of the game. KFS have to rely on young local talent to have a squad with depth. Most, if not all, other clubs in the 3rd division have decent size budgets are signing young ex-professionals from abroad to bolster their squads, it can be extremely difficult to compete against teams who are financially better off. Asked about how much the KFS budget is for the operating season, Gunnar replies “We sit down at the start of our season to discuss the issues with the board and sponsors, our costs are mainly outlined by the amount of travelling we need to make around the country for away matches and some training materials like match balls and pitch hire costs, for the 2021 season our budget was set at £20,000, we got special dispensation from the KSI to play two of our matches in the east of Iceland over a weekend to combat costs, although this is not particularly beneficial for the club as a whole, to be playing 2 matches in over a 24 hour period, we need to weigh up the financial aspects at the same time, the trip out to Vopnafjordur (to play Einherji) is a 17 hour round trip, and then travel down to Egilsstadir for the Hottur/Huginn match. Coach hire, plus spending a night in a hotel, was almost a quarter of our budget for both games, the final cost was around £5,000, our players are making big sacrifices for these matches as they could be missing out on overtime at work plus time away from their families.”

One thing I noticed while speaking to various club officials was the ethos and mentality that is drummed into the players, the islanders have a real identity and belief, even more so, than other clubs that I have visited around the country. Gunnar goes on to confirm to my observations “Yes, you are correct, for instance our cup final in 2020, the average age of our side was 19.6 years compared to the 25.7 years of IH, we always have to battle in the face of adversity, although we lost the final 3-2 it was one of the highlights of my career.”

What is the future aims for KFS? “I have spoken to the board of KFS and asked them the same question; as a former professional footballer, I’m never satisfied, I always want more and want to continue the journey and improve the development of the club. In my opinion, I would like KFS and IBV to have a closer cooperation, a similar relationship to what IA Akranes and Kari have in motion, where we can get more experienced players in our squad that are needing game time, there has been talk about it over the years, the Board of Directors at both clubs (KFS and IBV) need to sit round the table and discuss a strategy of creating closer links for the long-term future of football on the islands.”

Asked about his best moment in football, Gunnar replies “The light bulb moment – I’m a man-to-man type of coach, always speaking to our players, there are moments during training sessions and matches, when the guys are making errors or taking up wrong positions, most of our squad are very young and the methodology process we teach them is - to learn from mistakes, the guys are taking on my advice (whether it’s to get into better positions or tactical advice etc) when they turn round on the pitch and look at you or give you the thumb’s up, you can see it in their eyes, I get so much satisfaction from this, it’s a fantastic feeling to know that they are taking onboard what I have told them and they learning from the experience.” Gunnar possesses a true passion for the game and has a captivating persona, his knowledge of the game is second to none, the KFS Vestmannaeyjar officials are working tirelessly and diligently behind the scenes to improve the club infrastructure with their pragmatic approach.





Eythor Dadi Kjartansson

Eythor Dadi Kjartansson has played a pivotal role for KFS this season, the right-back was loaned to KFS from IBV to get some game time under his belt, the 21-year-old explains. "I was on the fringes of the IBV first team squad, the option arose to get more first team football so I immediately jumped at the chance to sign for KFS, gain more experience and improve my development, which will hopefully put me in good stead to make a permanent break-through into the IBV starting 11." It is exceedingly difficult to produce homegrown talent due to the island having such a small population.

However, some of the biggest names in Icelandic football have come from the islands: Asgeir Sigurvinsson – who played with VfB Stuttgart in Germany, and Gudmundur Torfason who had a decent career in Scotland; Icelandic football's all-time leading scorer, Tryggvi Gudmundsson, started his career at IBV and returned twice to play for his hometown club; Hermann Hreidarsson picked up the FA Cup at Portsmouth and has also been part of the excellent youth system on the island; Heimir Hallgrímsson played for KFS and was the island's dentist before taking on the job of Iceland's national team Manager; Gunnar Heidar Thorvaldsson also played for a number of European clubs. Eythor is studying sociology at Reykjavik University, however, during the summer months he returns to the island where he is a youth coach and groundkeeper at IBV, "It's a fulfilling job taking the coaching sessions with the kids, it is good to return home after being in the capital for most of the year." Like all players, everyone has ambitions of turning professional, "Of course, I would like to play abroad, but I'm under no illusions how big a step that is for myself, establishing a permanent 1st team

position with IBV is my priority. There are plenty of young fantastic technical players in Iceland, who can progress in the future and go on to further their careers in Europe." How can this small and remote island produce so many great players? Maybe because there isn't much to do around town, the youngsters just play football all day. These days the clubs have plenty of qualified coaches, training is well structured, and there are excellent indoor facilities. All of the names mentioned above are at an age when it was just the school sports hall that they could train in when harsh winter storms lay siege to the island. Ex-Liverpool, and England international, David James found himself playing in goal at IBV for a season after Hermann Hreidarsson persuaded the Englishman to come and play in the Icelandic Premier Division.

IBV won promotion to the Pepsi-Max Division in 2021, after a two-season exile playing in the Lengjudeild but have the difficult task of trying to maintain Pepsi status. IBV have lifted the Icelandic title on 3 occasions: 1979, 1997 & 1998, and the Icelandic Cup 5 times, with the last success coming in 2017. IBV are no strangers to the European scene having played 46 games in all competitions, winning on 7 occasions, and drawing 9 times. In the summer months, the appetite for football in the community is plain to see as the youngsters' train on the pitches outside the stadium for most of the day. On match days the whole community pulls together to help with stewarding, selling refreshments and food, as well as running various activities for younger kids at the stadium. An away day trip to Vestmannaeyjar is highly anticipated by fans of opposing clubs when the fixtures are released at the start of the season.



Herjólfssdalur is intimidatingly beautiful, whichever angle you look at it: a giant natural amphitheatre, with rock formations rising on all sides as you enter the valley. Herjólfssdalur is also the setting for the famous yearly Þjóðhátíð music festival held in August. On the last evening, the mountainside is set alight with a row of flames along the entire length of the valley – a magnificent sight to witness!





THE ISLAND

Vestmannaeyjar, just off the south coast of mainland Iceland, is situated directly across from the famous volcano Eyjafjallajökull. It is one of those mystical places that will leave you in awe with its seductive beauty. The ferry to Heimaey departs from Landeyjahöfn and takes 35 minutes; sailing into Heimaey harbour, through a narrow opening surrounded by intersecting ragged steep cliffs and a huge field of intimidating ebon lava fields, is an amazing experience to witness. Don't be misguided by Heimaey's small size, it has an incredible variety of landscapes densely compressed into one small island. There are vertical, craggy mountain ridges, rocky coastlines shaped by millennia of brutal winds, hidden beaches, volcanoes, moss covered lava flows and a magical valley. The chain of islands also boasts the biggest puffin colony in the world. The labyrinth of rocks on the entry point to the harbour is the oldest part of the island: forged by volcanic activity, from the hotspots deep beneath the sea, around 40,000 years ago. Initially the harbour and the cliffs around Herjólfsdalur were two separate islands, but eventually, they were connected by Eiðið, the small isthmus that runs between them. The rest of Heimaey didn't emerge until around 6,000 years ago when it was constructed from a combination of several eruptions, and Stórhöfði, the headland to the south, was formed as a third island. When Helgafell volcano arrived on the scene, all three were fused together into the

present island. A hike to the summit of Eldfell (Fiery Mountain) takes around 45 minutes. This famous volcano spectacularly erupted without warning in January 1973. The track to the summit is easily accessible, and the views are absolutely stunning in all directions: you can admire the impressive change of colour in the lava flows that were furiously boiling only a few decades ago and single-handedly enlarged the island by several square kilometres. It is incredible to think it didn't even exist 50 years ago. The twin volcano Helgafell offers sweeping panoramic views of the island. Up until that fateful night in 1973, Helgafell was the ruling volcano on the island.

Heimaey is a bustling little fishing hub, the first thing you notice when you enter the town is the pungent smell of the fish processing plants, at the busy harbour, as boats land their fresh catch. The warren of narrow streets and the candy-coloured painted rooftops, which sit aligned on the plateau in the shadow of the two volcanoes, gives the place a real homely feel. Over the winter, frequent sea squalls and storms can cut-off the island, from the rest of the country for days on end, however, the townsfolk are a resilient bunch of souls and are proud of their island heritage.

Vestmannaeyjar has become a major tourist destination as people come from all over the world to visit this magical little island and see the natural riches it has to offer.

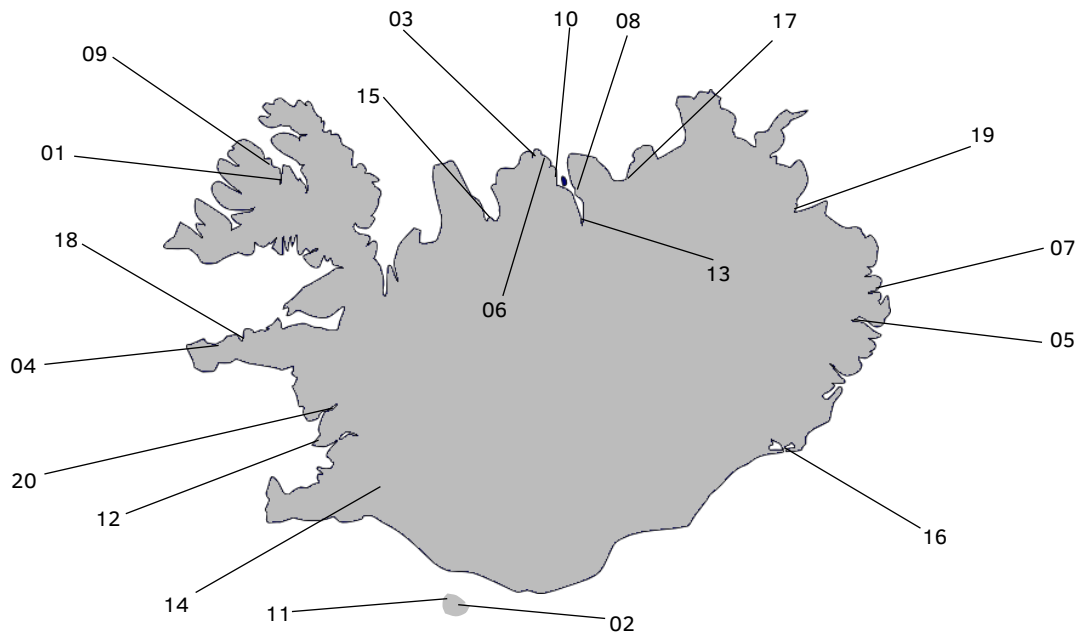


Blankets of thick fog rolling in from the sea, consume the islands.



Top 20 scenic stadiums in Iceland

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 01. Olisvollur - Isafjordur | 11. Tysvollur - Heimaey |
| 02. Hasteinsvollur - Heimaey | 12. Norduralsvollur - Akranes |
| 03. Siglufjardarvollur - Siglufjordur | 13. SaltPayvollur - Akureyri |
| 04. Olafsvikurvollur - Olafsvik | 14. Gryluvollur - Hveragerdi |
| 05. Eskjuvollur - Eskifjordur | 15. Saudarkroksvollur - Saudarkrokur |
| 06. Olafsfjardurvollur - Olafsfjordur | 16. Sindrivollur - Hofn |
| 07. Nordfjardurvollur - Neskaupstadur | 17. Vodafonevollur - Husavik |
| 08. Grenivikurvollur - Grenivik | 18. Grundarfjardarvollur - Grundarfjordur |
| 09. Skeidisvollur - Bolungarvik | 19. Vopnafjardurvollur - Vopnafjordur |
| 10. Dalvikurvollur - Dalvik | 20. Skallagrimsvollur - Borgarnes |







FACTS

- ◆ The highest attendance for an international match took place in 2004 when 20,204 witnessed Iceland beat Italy 2-0 at Laugardalsvöllur.
- ◆ The colours of the Iceland flag are represented by blue-sea, white-glaciers, and red-volcanoes.
- ◆ No player has reached the magic figure of scoring 20 goals during a single season in Iceland's topflight, five players are tied with 19 goals on the all-time record list: Andri Runar Bjarnason - Grindavik, Gudmundur Torfason - Fram, Tryggvi Gudmundsson - IBV, Thordur Gudjonsson and Petur Petursson both IA Akranes.
- ◆ The first Icelandic side to advance in European competition is Valur, who won on away goals after a 4-4 aggregate draw in 1967 against Jeunesse Esch from Luxembourg, in the following round Valur were thrashed 11-1 on aggregate by Hungarian outfit Vasas.
- ◆ Albert Gudmundsson's statue stands outside the KSI headquarters in Laugardalur, as a monument to Gudmundsson's example as both player and administrator. Gudmundsson, was the country's first professional footballer at a time of primitive conditions for the sport in Iceland. He played for Rangers, Arsenal, AC Milan, AS Nancy and OGC Nice. He also continued to work in football, most notably holding the post of KSI President between 1968 and 1973.
- ◆ Two Scotsmen have won the coveted Icelandic player of the year award – David Winnie in 1998 with KR, and Steven Lennon in 2020 with FH.
- ◆ Keflavik originally played in black shirts and white shorts. In 1973, the team changed its strip to yellow shirts and blue shorts. The reason given for the change was team's first European away match, against Ferencvaros in Budapest. The Keflavik players were playing under floodlights for the first time and had trouble spotting each other in their black shirts.
- ◆ Fram have reached 18 Icelandic Cup Finals, winning eight and losing ten times.
- ◆ 4 Deild side Afrika, have an unenviable record – From the 2019 - 2021 league seasons, they managed only 2 wins in 42 games, scoring just 22 times and conceding a whopping 316 goals.





COLOSSAL WASTES OF JAGGED PEAKS;
WITH A CRYSTALLINE BLANKET OF OPALINE VELVET;
CRAGS AND CHASMS, MAJESTIC TO BEHOLD;
AN ENTRANING SILENCE FILLS THE VALLEY;
CRISP ARCTIC AIR RESONATES THE SOUL.





KM REYKJAVIK



It has been a relentless uphill struggle for KM Reykjavik, one of Iceland's lowest ranked clubs who have only managed three leagues wins since they entered the domestic national league in 2019 – the club look's to the future for an upturn in fortunes.



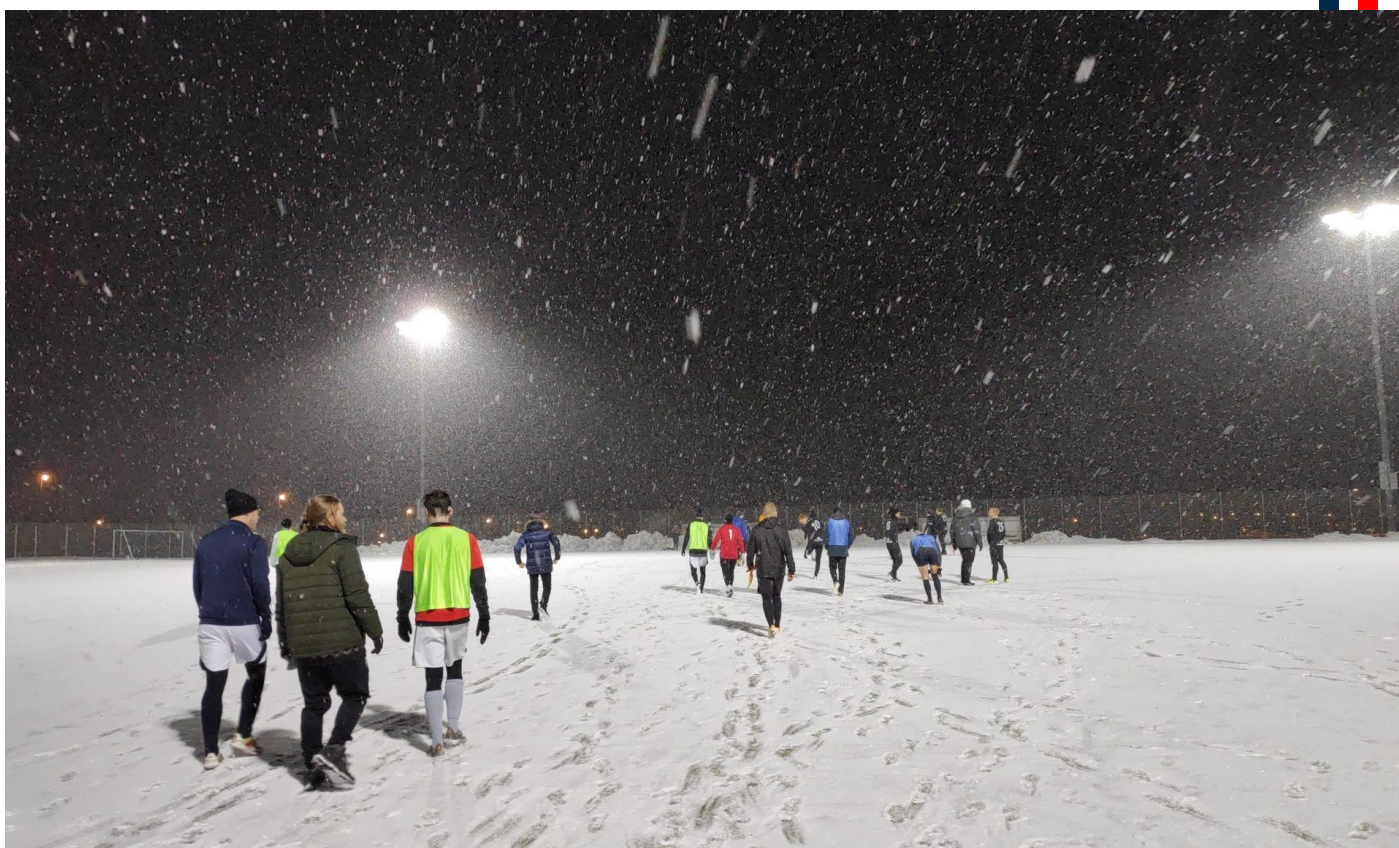
KM Reykjavik's Chairman, Joaquin Linares Cordoba, speaks candidly about the difficulties of running one of the lowest ranked clubs in Iceland. The 41-year-old Spaniard came to Iceland in 2006 and worked as a Spanish teacher before setting up his own business - Boreal Travel. I asked Joaquin how he became involved within football. "We used to have a 7-a-side team here (in Reykjavik) called Iberia FC which consisted of mostly Spanish ex-pats who loved playing football and wanted a kickabout, it was more like a pub team but fun all the same.

Living in the Vesturbaer neighbourhood, which is a KR Reykjavik stronghold, he would take his son, Tómas, to KR infant training sessions and follow his progress daily; Joaquin was then approached by a KR official to discuss a coaching role at youth level - KR would put him through his UEFA B licence in return for helping with the club's youth structure - Joaquin duly accepted the offer. How did KM Reykjavik come into existence? Joaquin explains, "My friend, Àlex Massot, and myself are founders of the club. We had been discussing the idea for some time, there was so much to take into account to lay the foundations: in the first instance we needed a pitch to play on, I have good connections at KR and KV, they agreed to let us groundshare at KR-vollur; I also had to set up a tax account with the authorities to run the club legally, this

all took a fair bit of time to arrange. KM Reykjavik eventually formed in May 2018." As the interview continued, Joaquin told me some of the many struggles the club has had to endure, it has been far from easy, "There were games, particularly during the 2019 season, when we only had 11 fit players for a match, it was tough, we have been on the wrong end of some heavy defeats, which can be demoralising on occasions, it can also be demanding to persuade some of our more talented players to remain at the club."

Joaquin possesses a true passion for the game and has an infectious persona. He makes it a family affair at KM by having Tómas (his son) and his daughter, Eyja, attend every home match on ball-boy duties. The club are giving players a chance to play football, albeit in the lowest category but then there is always a team that must finish bottom of any league! KM loosely translates as Reykjavik Downtown FC (Knattspyrnufélagið Miðbær.)

I have always had a soft spot for the underdog, and I sincerely hope KM manage to get a few wins under their belt. Joaquín invests many hours of his time, on a voluntary basis, merely for the love of the game. Choosing to do something you love means simultaneously choosing time apart from the ones you love most. People like Joaquín and the committee at KM are the unsung heroes that ensure grassroots football exists.



“We need to stabilise the club first and foremost, then we can start looking at getting positive results on the pitch, our aim is to become a respected 4 deild club within the next few years”

- Joaquín Linares Córdoba: Chairman, KM Reykjavik



KM REYKJAVIK

How difficult is it to attract players to arguably the weakest club in Iceland?

“It can be extremely challenging to get good players; we are planning ahead for the coming years. I get a lot of enquires from my homeland (Spain) about players wanting to come and play in Iceland. It is work in progress, we are looking at the idea of arranging jobs for players next summer, thus meaning they could also play with KM in their free time.”

How many players/members are involved within the club structure?

“We have 72 members at KM, we introduced a women’s team into the domestic league this season for the first time. There are around 36 players involved with each of the men’s and ladies’ teams; some players can get a bit frustrated at training sessions when everyone turns up due to the lack of space and the amount of pitch hire time we have. We need a big squad as many players are not available for every match due to work constraints, important family events, holidays etc. The players realise this knock-on effect and are fully behind what we are trying to build within the club structure.”

How many times does KM train every week?

“At the moment we are training 2 nights per week, next season we are looking at the possibility of going to 3 sessions per week to expand our training regime and get players physically and mentally prepared for the season ahead so they can reap the benefits.”

What is the main goal you are trying to achieve at the club?

“We need to stabilise the club first and foremost, then we can start looking at getting positive results on the pitch, our aim is to become a respected 4 deild club within the next few years. We do not have the financial clout to be aiming for promotion like some of the more astute 4 deild sides. Yes, we are a new club and struggle to get the results we crave, and take heavy defeats on a regular basis, but we must battle on regardless, even in the most difficult of circumstances.”

Proudest moment at KM Reykjavik?

“During the 2019 season we played Ulfarnir in a league match away from home and we were thrashed 8-1; at the return match I think the opposition expected just to turn up and win easily: we beat them 3-2. Our players were ecstatic after the match, it was our first real competitive win, it really was something else to see the smiles of joy on the player’s faces - this

is what makes football so special. I have also received private thanks from players because we are giving them a platform to play football, socialise and keep fit. Many friendships have been bonded between players from varying backgrounds and origins, this has been very touching and means so much to me that the group are still enjoying themselves even though we very rarely win a match.”

You have an uphill task ahead; the club lost every league match in 2020 – what is your motivation?

“In our first season players did not really know one another, there were language barriers: at one point during the 2019 season, we had 12 different nationalities playing for the club, the dressing room was always pretty quiet. Now after each match or training session we make a point of going to the swimming pool or go to a restaurant for a bite to eat. It is paramount to make the players feel they are part of an exclusive intertwined group. The players have embraced the camaraderie and the social aspects and created great friendships within the group; I am immensely proud of that fact! Now we are having to tell them to stop talking when the team tactics are being discussed before a match! We are an independent club, we receive no financial support from the municipality, which is a burden, we are always looking at new avenues to raise funds as it is so expensive running a football club these days.”

KM are very much an amateur club – what is the budget for the team this season?

“Yes, we are an amateur club, but we are always looking at ways of improving our concept on and off the pitch. This season’s budget was set at 3.4 million ISK (around £20,000) it is worth stating that the budget is shared between both the men’s and ladies’ teams. My business (Boreal Travel) is the main sponsor; players also pay £290 each season which includes all travel to matches, pitch hire and the club training kit.”

What does your matchday timeline consist of?

“If it is a mid-week match, I am usually at my business working during the day, I must admit, it is quite difficult to concentrate on my job as I am constantly thinking about our match at night, even more so, when I was coaching the team. The players and management always meet 90 minutes before a game, then give the players their tactics and team talk prior to the match, it’s also important to have a look around the dressing room to see if any players are nervous to give them a bit of a confidence boost.”





Neskaupstadur 65.1524° N, 13.6850° W



Heimaey 63.4277° N, 20.2674° W



Hofn 64.2497° N, 15.2020° W



Reykjavik 64.1466° N, 21.9426° W



Hnifsdalur 66.1101° N, 23.1237° W



Football is the beating heart of communities across the country. There is an inspiring story of two young 'football daft' boys who used to stay at the secluded hamlet Hnifsdalur (Knife's Valley) in the far reaches, north-west of the country. There was no pitch in the area, on which the two youngsters could play football, so they decided to write a letter to the Icelandic FA asking if they would build them a pitch. The FA replied and sent the boys the turf, and the local municipality provided the rest of the materials to build them an outdoor 5-a-side pitch, with the promise from the two lads that they would take care of the brand-new playing surface. There are now over 150 of these small pitches scattered all around the country.



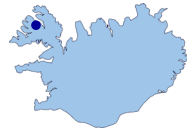
Olafsvik 64.8960° N, 23.7060° W



The picturesque fishing hub of Olafsvik, which is situated at the foot of the towering Snæfellsjökull glacier, has just over 1000 inhabitants and is home to local club Vikingur Olafsvik who have risen to prominence during the past ten years. The scenery on the way to this jewel, in the west of Iceland, is stunning as you navigate the road through rugged black lava fields and cascading waterfalls. This has got to be one of the most enchanting places in Iceland. The majestic Olafsvikurkirkja church overlooks the pitch; when God was dishing out football grounds, Olafsvikurvöllur must have been at the front of the queue. This club will be looking for more divine intervention in the years to come. When the summer sun is shining on the ground, this charming little place is football utopia.



Isafjordur 66.0749° N, 23.1251° W



Grenivik 65.9504° N, 18.1781° W





REYKJAVIK DERBY





The biggest match in the Icelandic calendar is the Derby showdown between the two most successful clubs in the country, KR and Valur, which usually attracts decent crowds of 2,000-3,000 fans, sometimes more if it is a match of significant importance. The clubs locked horns for the first time in 1915 at Melavollur: KR ran out convincing 5-1 winners. According to Icelandic FA records, the clubs have played 155 times: with KR slightly out in front with 59 victories to Valur's 55 wins; there has been 41 draws. There is a competitive rivalry between fans to see who has the bragging rights each season, a few hardcore fans will bring drums to matches, helping to create a derby atmosphere whilst still maintaining a friendly ambience, reflected with the fact that the crowds are family orientated with all ages and both sexes attending. It is exceedingly rare to encounter any bad blood or fighting between the locals compared to other Derby matches around Europe.

One of the most exciting matches ever took place during the 2020 season without fans, due to the Covid pandemic, as Valur travelled to KR to claim revenge for the 1-0 defeat they suffered

at the hands of their rivals on the opening day of the season at Origovollur. In a topsy turvy game that swung both ways, Valur finally won an epic nail-biting match 5-4 in Vestubær, which virtually ended any KR title aspirations. Entry for the biggest domestic fixture in Icelandic football is 2,000 ISK, which equates to £11 – a bargain compared to the prices charged even at non-league level in Scotland. If you are a groundhopper, it is a fixture that should be pencilled into to your diary if travelling to Iceland - it is not every day you witness a Derby match in the most northerly capital in the world! If you are attending a match at Valur, visit the Fjosid clubhouse (next to the stadium) where you can enjoy a few beers and a BBQ, the building also doubles up as a museum containing interesting memorabilia documenting the history of the club.

Reykjavik is home to nine clubs who are playing in the top three divisions, so there is plenty of Derby matches to attend in the capital - all with varying levels of rivalry. The Fjölínir – Fylkir fixture can also be a feisty affair between the two adjoining neighbourhoods who are based in the east-side of Reykjavik.



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Iceland continues to punch way above their weight at youth development level compared to most other countries who have invested millions of pounds into the sport with extraordinarily little to show for it. There are football facilities everywhere and even mini pitches for people to use any time of the day or night without daft restrictions (Kids in Scotland are climbing 30-foot fences just to get on to a pitch for a kickabout).

Iceland has moved on the next phase trying of improving its youth infrastructure, to enhance the development, they are turning to technology.

The KSI are trying to educate Icelandic clubs about the importance of filming all games from the youth to the first teams. Iceland is in many ways one of the world's most modern and digitised countries. However, there is still a way to go for Icelandic football to reach the level of modernisation that characterises the similarity with the rest of the big academy clubs around Europe. With the help of Veo software and other analysis systems, they are trying to make sure that everybody who is involved in Icelandic football understands and recognises the importance of modern technology and not only that they have it, but that they know how to use it accordingly, to ascertain the best results. Data is the new religion for most football coaches, although it is still in its infancy. Demographics, data mapping, data commentary and data visuals are proving to be the latest way forward for the next generation of players and coaching staff - whether traditionalists of the game like it or not.

The "Come to Football" grassroots project, a recent collaboration between the KSI and Landsbankinn, (one of the largest banks in Iceland) continues over the long summer months and has proved a great success. It includes visits to smaller municipalities around the country with the focus of getting kids involved in football activities (at a time when most youngsters will have their heads buried in a laptop with dreams of being the next big gamer or influencer.) Siguróli Kristjánsson, usually known as Moli, oversees the project, he will set up fun and diverse football camps to promote interest with the support and backing of the local football clubs in rural areas. To examine the mindset of the Icelandic football team, we must first look at the wider context when it came to fruition. Heavy investment has been flowing

into coaching standards and facilities from the late 1990s onwards. In the boom era before the 2008 financial crisis, all-weather pitches and indoor centres were constructed; today there are 8 full-sized all-weather indoor pitches (with more planned to be built) and 20 + outside artificial pitches and over 150 mini pitches. Whereas players could not play or train for months on end, football can now be played through the dark winter months when the weather is extreme. To put that infrastructure into context, that is one full-sized pitch per 15,000 inhabitants. Of course, pitches themselves do not lead to a successful development environment. All those football halls, arenas, and outdoor fields are built by the municipalities and handed over to local clubs with a mandate to serve the community. Players pay an annual fee to join a club, which is further subsidized by the municipality.

The cost of playing football at amateur level in Scotland has skyrocketed in the past few years, the Scottish Government has failed its people with regards to investing in sports facilities and football pitches, in my hometown of Clydebank, I spoke to one of the coaches who is dismayed by the lack of pitches available, at present, four clubs are using one pitch for training sessions and matches. The Scottish Minister for public health and sport would learn a thing or two from her Icelandic counterparts as Scotland continues to struggle with drug and alcohol issues especially, teenagers. The Icelandic authorities took a radical approach as drug and alcohol misuse spiked in the country between 1997 and 2012. State funding was increased to help kids from low-income families receive help to take part in sport, music, and arts activities in the form of a leisure card which gave families 35,000 Krona (£250) per year, per child, to pay for recreational activities as an alternative; and the percentage who participated in organised sports increased from 24% to 42% as smoking, drinking and cannabis use in the teenage age groups plummeted. No matter the age, ethnicity, income, everyone in Iceland is provided with consistent, high-calibre training sessions from competent coaches, three to four times a week. Bringing Icelandic football up to date on modern tech is not only a matter of buying the tools, but education is also paramount to the KSI's strategy and data will force football to become a more intelligent concept in the future.





Heimir Hallgrímsson



Former Icelandic national team coach Heimir Hallgrímsson knows only too well about the importance of having a well-structured grassroots development model. “Youth development is changing around Europe, here in Iceland we have very good facilities, infrastructure and excellent coaches, but we need to think outside the box a little more.” Many youngsters these days, at the time of signing professional contracts, are somewhat lured by the financial gains, there can also be external pressure from overzealous agents. Heimir is more than aware of the complexities this can have on promising talents coming through the youth system. “We need to find the correct balance of players who are passionate about football and motivated by the game – not just thinking about financial aspects.” Clubs in Iceland are still tagged with amateur status; will this hinder the Icelandic game from progressing in the coming decades? Heimir explains “That’s a good point, we need to make our game more sustainable, in the past we have done things a little bit differently from other countries with regards to youth development and tweaked it, when necessary, we have our own football identity. My own personal view is that clubs need to utilise connections abroad, it’s important for clubs to investigate other aspects of development such as loan deals and grassroots education. When I was managing IBV we had a connection with Crewe Alexandra, they set out a program for players that IBV had on loan which involved one on one coach education, nutrition and recovery. The benefits were exemplary for all parties involved, the players went back to Crewe with a stronger mindset and gained valuable experience from playing abroad.”

Elīza Spruntule



Ex-Latvian international defender Eliza Spruntule signed on the dotted line for IBV in 2019. The 28-year-old, who has 45 caps for her country, impressed IBV during her debut season. The club extended her contract and offered her a coaching role within the youth academy. Eliza is excited with the prospect of transitioning from player to coach. "I have always been interested in coaching, I have sat my UEFA B licence and hope to go on and acquire the UEFA A badge at some point. I'm loving my time on Vestmannaeyjar, the townsfolk and coaching staff are very friendly, and they have made it very easy for me to settle on the island." The Covid situation has had a detrimental effect for clubs everywhere and changed the footballing landscape, I asked Eliza about the implications it has had. "Yes, it has been difficult at times due to ever changing government guidelines which we had to follow, we were having to train the kids in smaller groups which wasn't ideal, but we just had to make the best of a difficult situation." I spent a large part of my day with Eliza during my visit to Vestmannaeyjar, one thing that became evident immediately was her love of all things football - it's in her DNA, the enthusiasm Eliza shows on the training pitch will undoubtedly filter through to the youngsters taking their first tentative steps playing the game and provide them with more confidence. What does the future hold for Eliza? "Coaching for sure, I like the Icelandic mentality and love working here and teaching the kids who are always paying full attention to my instructions, it is a really fulfilling job, it has given me a platform to further my coach education."



Grassroots football development has been on the rise since the turn of the millennium. 11-year-old, right-back, Tómas Berg Dagsson, has been playing with his hometown club Breidablik since the age of 3 (Yes, the kids take their football seriously in this part of the world). The Kopavogur based side have around 1,450 registered boys and girls playing at all age groups. The town is expanding rapidly due to population growth which is also a contributing factor to the increased number of members. Like all youngsters, Tómas has dreams of becoming a professional player, like his hero: Phil Foden, and play for his favourite team Manchester City. Breidablik, have arguably, the best football academy in the country so Tómas is playing in the correct environment to progress with his development under the watchful eye of UEFA license coaching staff. I asked Tómas if there was any club he wouldn't play for, to which I received an immediate response, "I would never play for HK" (HK are the close rivals of Breidablik also from the town of Kopavogur). Iceland has invested heavily with youth development over the past decade, the KSI are also taking a proactive approach with the grassroots concept. Municipalities and clubs will also arrange youth tournaments which are held all over the country during the summer months. Tómas had a wry grin on his face when I asked him about the best goal he has scored. "I don't score many goals as I play in defence, however, I scored against IA Akranes at the N1 tournament held in Akureyri which was a nice moment." The ambitious youngster would also like to follow in the footsteps of his favourite national team player: Arni Freyr Skulason. Asked about his most memorable moment watching the national team "There have been a few, but beating England at the Euros was fantastic, I was at the match with my family, everyone was so excited about the victory." Even at a young age Tómas understands he will have to put in the hard work on the training pitch if he wants to achieve his dream of having professional aspirations - A challenge that doesn't faze the fresh-face youngster.



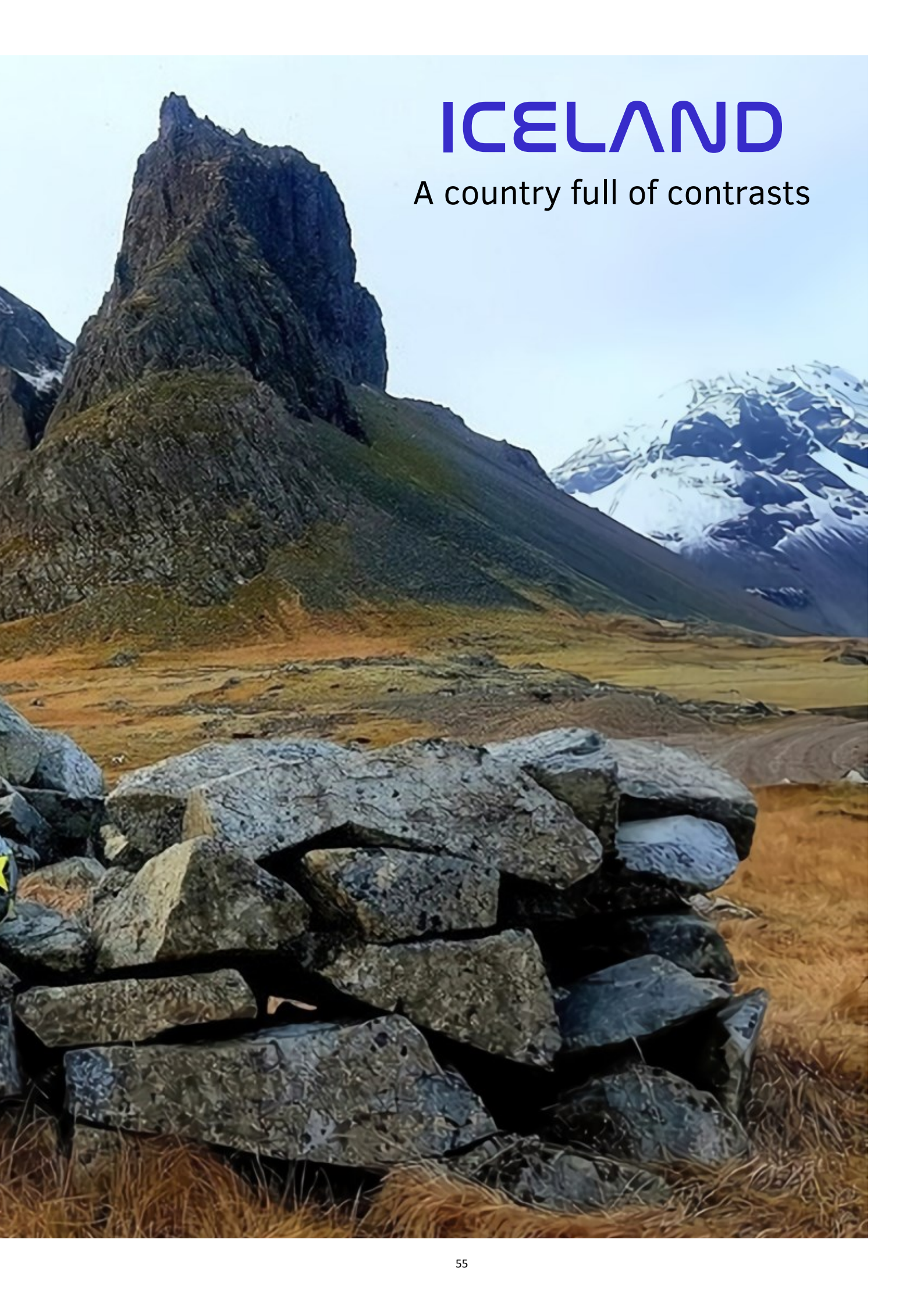
The building blocks - youth development is an integral part of Icelandic football.





ICELAND

A country full of contrasts



THE LAND OF



Geldingadalur volcano



FIRE & ICE



Jokulsarlon



Whilst the modern city of Reykjavik really began to establish itself during the 18th century, its history is in fact considerably longer. Towards the end of the 9th century, Nordic traveller Ingolfr Arnarson arrived in this part of Iceland with his fellow Norsemen and founded the country's earliest known settlement. It is widely acknowledged that Arnarson selected this spot by employing a traditional Viking method for choosing where to land. He simply threw some wooden poles overboard when the shoreline became visible and watched where they were washed up - this was to become the future city of Reykjavik. This name literally translates as 'Bay of Smoke' and was adopted due to the plentiful geothermal hot springs around the area. Interestingly, Viking remains have since been discovered close to the public square of Austurvollur.

Reykjavik is the vibrant heart of Iceland and offers everything from style-conscious bars and restaurants to great museums and galleries. At the peak of summer, the country is abuzz with energy due to the long summer days and short nights—which lengthen toward the end of June. Almost all roads and trails are open to being traversed. Iceland is serenely beautiful during the summer when the weather is comparatively mild, nights are illuminated by the midnight sun. From June to August, you can travel around this small island in the North Atlantic without facing winter's hazardous driving conditions and brutal weather. You will have the chance to hike Iceland's tallest mountains, repel into its calderas and caves, walk in the tracks of Vikings, or follow the trails of the medieval Icelandic sagas. Aside from the modern and cosmopolitan capital, Reykjavik, population centres around the country are small, with diminutive towns, fishing villages, farms and minute hamlets clustered along the coastal fringes. The interior of the country, meanwhile, is a starkly beautiful wilderness of ice fields, windswept upland plateaux, infertile lava and ash deserts, and the frigid vastness of Vatnajökull, Europe's largest glacier.

Iceland's location on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge also gives it one of the most volcanically active landscapes on Earth. It is peppered with everything from naturally occurring hot springs, scoldingly hot bubbling mud pools and noisy steam vents to a string of unpredictably violent volcanoes, which have regularly devastated huge parts of the

country. Travel to Iceland and you can visit intriguing museums, take part in good old-fashioned Reykjavik pub crawl (rúntur), seek out puffin colonies, marvel at the Northern Lights, or go whale-watching. It is a country that must be seen to be believed! To see the wild side of Iceland, travel on Route 1, the Ringroad, where you will see enchanting green wide spaces, black sands on pristine coastlines, and brooding hills and steep, alluring mountains.

The West Fjords, where little fishing villages sit snugly below table-top mountains. Isafjordur's proximity to the wilds of the Hornstrandir peninsula makes for fantastic hiking opportunities. However, if you want the least touristy part of Iceland, head for the East Fjords. Make time for a stop off in Akureyri, Iceland's second largest town, also known as the capital of the north, it is a relaxing place to spend a couple of days, with cafés and restaurants and a wonderful botanical garden. Akureyri is also a good base point for visits to mystifying landscapes of Lake Mývatn. The Ringroad (known in Icelandic as the Hringbraut), which largely follows the coast in a 1500km circuit of the country via Reykjavík, Akureyri, Egilsstaðir and Höfn. In winter snow ploughs do their best to keep the route open to all vehicles. Elsewhere, while stretches around towns might be surfaced, most Icelandic roads are gravel. While many of these are accessible to all vehicles, some – such as most roads through the Interior – are only negotiable in high-clearance four-wheel-drives.





Between September and January is when the natural phenomenon - The Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis can often be seen throughout the country.



EATING & DRINKING

Harðfiskur - wind-dried haddock or cod, is a popular snack, eaten by tearing off a piece and chewing away, though some people like to spread butter on it first. Icelandic seafood is superb and even everyday things like a breakfast of sild (pickled herrings) are worth trying. Hákarl (Greenland shark) is a more doubtful delicacy, as it is first buried for up to six months in sand to break down the high levels of toxins contained in its flesh. Different parts of the rotted shark yield either white or dark meat, and the advice for beginners is to start on the milder-tasting dark (gler hákarl), which is translucent – rather like smoked glass. Either way, the flavour is likely to make your eyes water, even if connoisseurs compare the taste and texture favourably to a strong cheese. Do not worry if you cannot stomach the stuff, neither can many of the locals.

As for meat, there's ordinary hangikjöt, (smoked lamb), popular in sandwiches and as part of a traditional Christmas spread; svið, boiled and singed sheep's heads; haggis-like varieties of slátur ("slaughter"), is a favourite; or if you are particularly brave try súrsaðir hrútsþungar, (pickled rams' testicles). Game dishes include the grouse-like ptarmigan (rjúpa), which takes the place of turkey at Icelandic Christmas dinners; and puffin (lundi) which is usually smoked before being cooked. More appealing to non-Icelandic palates is - lobster (humar), salmon (lax), trout (silingur) and char (bleikja) are all superb and relatively inexpensive. Home-produced cheese and dairy products are particularly good, and it is worth trying yoghurt-like skyr, sold all over the country plain or flavoured with fruit. Pancakes known as flatbrauð or laufbrauð are delicious.

Alcohol is expensive – pick up a bottle on arrival (Keflavík airport's duty-free is the cheapest place to buy alcohol in the country) – state-owned stores Vinbúð sell liquor and beer, however, these shops usually have ludicrously restricted opening hours – sometimes just an hour, five days a week. Full-strength beer was illegal until March 1989, when the 75-year-old prohibition laws were revoked. March 1st, is still celebrated as Bjórdagurinn, or Beer Day, with predictably riotous celebrations organized at bars throughout the capital. Some bars also serve domestically brewed craft beers. Hard-liquor enthusiasts should try brennivín, a local spirit distilled from potatoes and flavoured with caraway seeds. It is powerful stuff, affectionately known as svart dauði or "black death", and certainly warms you up in winter – you will also welcome its traditional use to clean the palate after eating fermented shark.

Einstök ales - The White Ale, Arctic Pale Ale, Toasted Porter, and Wee Heavy. All produced by the Einstök brewery in Akureyri, each brand is the result of years of hard work, testing, and ingenious new ideas. The White Ale, is a refreshing beer, tinged with orange peel and coriander. The Arctic Pale Ale uses three different kinds of hops for its unique flavour. These beers are 5.2% ABV and 5.6% Vol respectively. For something darker and stronger, you may prefer the Toasted Porter, which has delicious bitter elements such as dark chocolate and toffee, although its black colour makes it look very noxious, it is a relatively average strength of 6% ABV and is exceptionally smooth to drink. For something stronger, however, you could go with the Wee Heavy, which, as its name suggests is heavily inspired by Scotland; it is 8% ABV. Kaldi Blonde is a popular bottled beer in Iceland, and it is little wonder why. Brewed in the Pilsner tradition and inspired by Czech lager, it is a coppery, golden colour, with a smooth texture and tantalising, bitter taste from the roasted malt. At 5% proof, Kaldi Blonde was the first beer produced by the brewery Bruggsmiðjan Kaldi, which was formed in 2006. Today, they even have a bar, called Kaldi, where you can get Blonde on tap, as well as many of their other unique and delicious labels. Bruggsmiðjan Kaldi is a notable brewery in the sense that it does not add any sugar or preservatives to any of its beers. Produced by Ölvisholt Brugghús, a brewery in Selfoss, Lava Beer is one of the most internationally renowned of all produced in Iceland. A Russian Imperial Stout with 9.6% ABV, it is a pitch-black beer flavoured with dark chocolate, roasted malt, and smoke, with a dark brown head. In 2012, Lava beer won the US Open Beer Championship contest for the best imperial smoked beer. The Ölvisholt Brugghús brewery has been operating since 2007 and has several other beers on the market year-round, with some seasonal options. Egils Gull offers you a traditional Vol 5%, crisp lager experience. Golden colour, small white head, light toasted malt nose, grainy aroma, and fresh lemony hops in the mouth. It is brewed in the style of pale Munich-lagers from pilsner malt, with locally grown barley, and pure Icelandic water. Gull has received several prizes, including the "World's Best Standard Lager" at the World Beer Awards 2011. Viking Classic (Vol 4.6%) is a tasty Vienna style beer with more filling and a darker amber colour than the traditional lager. The carefully chosen malt balances sweetness and a hint of caramel. Viking and Gull the most popular brands in the country.



REYKJAVIK





PLACES TO VISIT IN REYKJAVIK

- ◆ **PERLAN** - Standing at 25m high, Perlan is one of Reykjavik's most striking buildings and although it was opened to the public in 1991 it still looks a standout piece of architecture for its modern construction. Up on the fourth level there is a 360-degree viewing platform where you can get the best panoramic views of the capital and when the sun sets it is also spectacular spot for the northern lights.
- ◆ **THE SUN VOYAGER** - A beautiful sculpture of a Viking ship located by the ocean on a small peninsula by Saebraut, close to the city centre. The sculpture by Jon Gunnar Arnason symbolises the Viking past of the Icelanders and an ode to the sun. It serves as a reminder to Icelandic history and heritage when the first Viking settlers arrived in the country.
- ◆ **HALLGRIMSKIRKJA** - Reykjavik's most iconic building and is visible from almost anywhere in the city. The tower of the church is among the city's highest buildings and offers a fantastic view of the city. It is named after the Icelandic poet and clergyman Hallgrimur Petursson. The architect who designed it, Gudjon Samuelsson is said to have designed it to resemble the basalt columns of Iceland's landscape.
- ◆ **NAUTHOLSVIK** - A little bit of paradise is to be found in the form of a golden-sanded geothermal beach at Nautholsvik in Reykjavik. It was opened in 2001 to the delight of locals and tourist alike and now attracts an estimated 530,000 visitors each year. The creation of the geothermal beach was an ambitious, but extraordinarily successful project involving the construction of a lagoon with large sea walls. Cold sea and hot geothermal water fuse together, resulting in higher temperatures for everyone to enjoy even when it is snowing



Harpa is one of Reykjavik's greatest and distinguished landmarks. It is a cultural and social centre in the heart of the city and features stunning views of the surrounding mountains and the North Atlantic Ocean. Harpa is a destination for intrigued travellers and its grand-scale award-winning architecture has attracted 7 million visitors since its opening, May 4, 2011.



PLACES TO VISIT AROUND ICELAND

- ◆ Strokkur erupting at Geysir. Visible from many kilometres away as palls of steam spouts above the plains. The area has been active for thousands of years, but the springs' positions have periodically shifted as geological cracks open or close; the current vents appeared in the thirteenth-century.
- ◆ Blue Lagoon Take a dip in the sublime waters of this famous open-air swimming pool, fed by geothermal water, and set in the middle of a lava field.
- ◆ Golden Circle Visit Þingvellir, site of Iceland's original open-air parliament, hot waterspouts at Geysir, and a stunning two-tier waterfall at Gullfoss.
- ◆ Akureyri Chill on the north coast in Iceland's second-largest town, renowned for its sunny summer days and thriving bar and restaurant scene.
- ◆ Húsavík Whale watching is on everybody's list of must-dos in Iceland, and the expertly run tours from Húsavík offer virtually guaranteed sightings.
- ◆ Lake Mývatn A proliferation of geological oddities, from bubbling mud pools to steam vents, clustered around a beautiful lake teeming with birdlife.



The Saurbæjarkirkja church in the Eyjafjörður region of Iceland. Built in 1858, it is one of only six turf churches that still exist in Iceland. Most churches in the country were built of this material until well into the 19th century. Saurbæjarkirkja church has thick turf and stone walls on the outside for protection against the weather.



There are more than 350 churches across Iceland. For a nation of only 330,000 people, that is a high number and may lead some to think that Icelanders are particularly religious. When Icelanders are born, they are immediately registered as Christian into the Lutheran church of Iceland. While 85% of Iceland's inhabitants are supposedly Christian, the country is considered the sixth-most atheistic nation globally. Travel anywhere in Iceland however, and you cannot help spotting a church, sometimes even in the most random of places. Iceland was Christianised in 1000AD by law, although the history of Christianity goes back to the earliest Irish hermit settlers in the Early Middle Ages, 100-years before the Norse arrived. The lawful adoption of Christianity was a compromise between the heathen and Christian chieftains and Christianisation brought with its certain advantages such as literary traditions replacing oral histories. The word for church in Icelandic is 'kirkja' and the names for each church will feature this suffix. Although Icelanders do not regularly attend church services, there is a respect for their part in Icelandic history and, quite often, a deep appreciation for their beauty. Not so long ago, churches across the country were left with their doors open and visitors could stop by for a look or a quiet moment of contemplation. Unfortunately, due to the disrespectful actions of a few, they are now locked and if you wish to have a look inside, you will have to check the local opening hours.





THE INTERIOR

Nothing you see elsewhere in Iceland prepares you for the desolate, raw beauty of the barren upland plateau that is the interior – known in Icelandic as hálendið or “highlands” – Europe’s last true wilderness. The violence of the elements here means that Iceland’s heart is an arid and uninhabited place, with no towns or villages - just cinematic vistas of seemingly infinite grey gravel plains, glacial rivers and lava fields punctuated by ice caps, volcanoes, and jagged mountains.





The Herring Era Museum - Siglufjordur







FAREWELL

SEYDISFJARDARVOLLUR

On Friday, 18 December 2020, tragedy struck: a huge landslide fell through the Eastern town of Seydisfjörður - causing enormous damage to more than 10 houses, some of which were swept into the sea. The entire town was evacuated. First responders and several townsfolk were in the danger area: some residents barely escaping the ferocious landslide.

Seydisfjörður is the town at highest risk of landslides in Iceland, due not only to the tall mountains that overlook the town but also the large number of valleys, canyons, and overhangs. The town experienced the same amount of rainfall as Reykjavík expects in an average eight-and-a-half months. The town was drenched by 733 millimetres of rain in ten days: the large majority of which came over a five-day period. Reykjavík receives an average of 860 millimetres of rain per year, by comparison.

The local football club, Huginn, who were formed in 1913, are one of the oldest clubs in Iceland. The Seydisfjörður based outfit have spent much of their 108 years of existence in the lower echelons of Icelandic football. There has only been one foray into the first division which is still quite an

amazing achievement considering the town has a population of just 665 inhabitants. The club has fallen on hard times over recent years: they finished bottom of 2 Deild in 2018 picking up just 6 points from the entire league campaign.

With local rivals, Hottur, from the nearby town of Egilsstaðir also relegated, after lengthy talks, Huginn and Hottur officials decided amalgamation was decisive for the long-term future of both clubs. This did not go down well with the hardcore fans, on either side, as many feared the clubs were losing their footballing identity. Financially, it made sense as it was the only way forward for the combined Hottur/Huginn FC to compete at a higher level. Rural clubs are highly dependent on foreign players to bolster their squads, which is costly, so Hottur/Huginn can now focus on developing





local talent in both towns, thus having a larger catchment area. The ground Seydisfjardarvöllur is out of this world, sandwiched between the serene Mt. Strandartindur (1010m) and Mt. Bjölfur (1085m), the pitch is surrounded by brooding mountainous terrain and cascading waterfalls that unleash their ferocious liquid energy down the valleys.

The rickety, wooden bench, main stand just adds an extra charm to this picturesque ground. The playing surface was gravel up until 1995, then grass was introduced but this brought its own issues as the pitch was usually waterlogged, with little grass-growth until mid-June due to the climate and location. Early season home matches would be played on the artificial surface at Fellabaer (a 30-minute drive away) until Seydisfjardarvöllur was in playable condition - usually around July. The

mountain, which still bears the scars from the landslide, is extremely unstable so it would be impossible to restore the damaged houses in the same area.

For the townsfolk to try to re-build their lives after the devastation, it was decided by the District council to construct new housing and amenities on the relatively safe plot at Seydisfjardurvöllur. For the town's football legacy there was one final swansong before the development of the new housing. Huginn players, past and present, played in a charity match to raise funds for the club. A large crowd turned up to pay homage and reminisce of past glories that have taken place on the pitch - sadness was etched on a few faces as the final whistle was blown on a ground that was an integral part of the community.





On 22nd May, a large crowd turned out to witness the final game at Seydisfjardarvöllur - one of the oldest pitches in Iceland with the first game traced back to 1916. After a poignant match, as mist rolled down the valley to envelop the town, a symbolic white cross was placed on the centre circle to formally close the ground. There are high hopes a deal can be struck with the local authorities to build another pitch on the outskirts of town. Seydisfjördur is best known for being an attractive and artistic town, especially noted for its colourful timber houses. It is a national priority to re-build them to their original splendour.



Seydisfjardarvöllur 1916 - 2021



The dreamy and mesmeric Olisvollur stadium is perched at the bottom of the vertical Eyrarfjall mountain. The ground is just a long ball punt away from the freezing waters of Pollur bay at the mouth of the fjord: it looks as if a giant troll (from the sagas) has placed the ground lovingly on its location and wandered off, as most of the terrain in this part of the world is mountainous and there is not a great deal of flat land for a football pitch. The panoramic views which this ground has to offer are, quite simply, staggering. At the vantage point behind the main stand, I was taking photos and had to stop to really appreciate the view and whispered to myself WTF... the photo does not do the stadium any justice - you must visit the place to take in the enormity of the chiselled mountains that are peppered with snow, that provide the backdrop to this alluring ground. The pitch, which usually gets brutalised by the Arctic gales and snow, was in pristine condition due to low snowfall over the winter.

Olisvollur was built in 2013 and has seating for 540 spectators although there is plenty of standing space around the ground, the average home matches attract between 200-300 spectators. There were plans to put a roof on the stand, but this would have gone way over the budget costs, so this idea was eventually shelved. Underneath the stand there is a shooting range for the local gun club.

Isafjordur is remote - even by Icelandic standards

Travelling to away games can be exceedingly difficult and costly due to the logistics of Isafjordur - which is remote even by Icelandic standards. Vestri will set off at 7am just for a match in Reykjavik. However, if Vestri have a match in the East of Iceland then that can be a 20 hour round trip. I don't think fans of any Scottish central belt clubs can ever complain about travelling up to Dingwall for a mid-week clash with Ross County!





VESTRI



Isafjordur is located in the northwest of the country, it is the largest settlement of the Westfjords, and is one of the few large enough in the peninsula to be considered a town, with a population of around 2,600 inhabitants, it is the capital and administrative area of the region and the centre of trade, commerce, and fishing. Granted municipal status in 1786, the oldest house still standing in Iceland, built in 1734, is located in the town. Isafjordur had one of the largest fisheries in the country, however, several factors including fishing restrictions in the 1980s, and monopolisation from bigger fisheries in Reykjavik, led to a sizeable decline in the town's population. The climate is tundra, bordering closely on subarctic, meaning the winters are cold and the summers cool. Due to its location, in a fjord surrounded by steep mountains, during the peak of the winter solstice the sun's rays don't reach the town for weeks on end. The town hosts a multitude of events and festivals such as the Ski Week Festival and the Swamp Football European Championship.



IA AKRANES



The fishing town of Akranes is home to one of the most successful clubs in the country. IA Akranes have produced some of the best talent ever to grace Icelandic football. A historic club with a rich footballing heritage.















Ríkharður Jónsson

1929-2017



From an early age, Ríkharður Jónsson enjoyed playing football, amongst other sports, and so joined the Akranes Football Association. In 1946, at the age of just 16, Ríkharður was a substitute for Iceland's first ever international match against Denmark, however, the following year Ríkharður made his national team debut at the tender age of 17 - in a 2-4 defeat against Norway at Melavollur. While studying in Reykjavik, he played with rivals Fram, but after his studies concluded he moved back to his hometown and played with the IA for the rest of his career. Ríkharður had a glittering football career: playing 185 games for IA, scoring 139 goals. He won six championship medals and was capped 33 times for the national team between 1946 and 1965, of which he was captain in 22 games. He scored 17 times for his country, this made him top goal scorer of the national team. In 2006 his national goal scoring record was equalled by Eiður Guðjohnsen, in 2007, it was eventually broken.

Ríkharður trained with Arsenal in 1959 and was offered a contract by the English side but a serious back injury prevented him playing with the North London giants. After his playing career ended, he became coach of the national football team from 1969 to 1971. Ríkharður was also the Manager and Chairman of IA for many years and became an honorary member of the Akranes Sports Association, the KSI and Olympic Association of Iceland. Ríkharður was honoured with the highest accolades, from the governing bodies, for his excellence within all sporting movements. The term 'legend' is used very loosely in today's modern game, Ríkharður Jónsson, on the other hand, had a colossal presence on and off the pitch and is still warmly remembered as the man who helped revolutionise football and other sporting disciplines in the fishing town of Akranes.

Jón Gunnlaugsson & Gísli Gíslason



It's vitally important to retain the long-term preservation of the club's past; Jón Gunnlaugsson, Gísli Gíslason and Sturlaugur Haraldsson, as well as a few others, are custodians of IA's historical records, and they are currently in the process of giving their knowledgeable input to author Bjorn Thor Bjornsson (who is writing a detailed book documenting the unique 100 year history of football in Akranes, due for release in 2022, to coincide with their centenary celebrations) and at the same time, unearthing forgotten photographs and stories while researching the archives. Jón Gunnlaugsson played with IA for many years and has retained a deep devotion for the club. Gísli was brought up in the Reykjavik suburb of Vesturbaer, his allegiances were to the black and white of KR (during his playing days) but over the years his loyalty has swung to the yellow and black of IA. It was an absolute pleasure to sit down with these two pillars of Icelandic football, their knowledge of the game is second to none - it's not very often that I get totally transfixed during interviews - the intricate details, dates, scores, and names from bygone years fluently rolled off their tongues. It would have been easy to spend hours listening to them reminiscing about the game from 50 years ago. They told me a fascinating story about how IA acquired their yellow and black colours; "One of the board members, Karl Gudmundsson, was so impressed by the German side Borussia Dortmund, that following a meeting between officials at IA, it was decided that the club would adopt the same colours of the Bundesliga side." Travelling to matches was far from ideal for Akranes when the Icelandic game was still in its infancy, "The road infrastructure wasn't the best back in the day, it would take hours to travel round the fjords, and also, most games were played at Melavollur stadium in Reykjavik which meant players, officials and fans had to travel by boat for our matches in the capital."

Elfa Björk Sigurjónsdóttir



IA Akranes has a small but loyal fan base, Elfa Bjork is one of the IA hardcore who will turn out to support the team, home and away, no matter how they are performing on the pitch. Elfa has been a regular at Norduralsvollur since 2014, when she relocated from Reykjavik to take up a new administrative job with the club. In Iceland, most fans will make their own way and drive to away matches; when asked whether the IA supporters group ever organise buses for away days Elfa replies "We have done this a few times in the past, but it can be difficult to organise, we have to take a lot into consideration, for example, if fans are working shifts, or unfavourable weather forecasts can also play a big part as quite a few stadiums don't have cover on the stands, which can put people off." Supporters groups have started to become slightly more structured over the past few years, "We are proactively encouraging fans to join us in the singing section of the stadium, I'm always looking at new ways to create a better atmosphere; I take my cow bell to every match to create more noise, we also have a few guys on the drums, it has often been said that our away support is more boisterous, however, we need more younger supporters to join us in the stands." Elfa's passion for the club and community is heart-warming, she has even made hand rattles to give out to the kids during matches, you can only admire her dedication. What has been her defining moment as an IA fan? "In 2018, when we won promotion to the Pepsi division after beating Selfoss (away 1-3) was a magnificent feeling, it was a fantastic journey back home, everyone was delighted. More excitement followed a week later when our nearest rivals, HK Kopavogur, lost their final league match, meaning we won the title on goal difference."





Akraneshöllin, which dominates the town's skyline, has been a godsend to the community since the arena was inaugurated on 21 October 2006 at a cost of £5.3 million. The hall is a hive of activity for the locals, during the dark winter months, when the weather is unforgiving. Players can train all year round at the multi-purpose arena, which has seating for 409 spectators. The doors are always open, if the hall is not booked for specific training sessions or a match, it is free to use for anyone wanting a kick-about. Running along the length of the arena is a photo museum with interesting archive images and historical facts from IA Akranes' proud footballing legacy.

FINANCIAL IMBALANCE

Football tournaments are often arranged into divisions of roughly similar ability, where outcomes retain a degree of uncertainty. Sensible arrangements such as these have become strained in the commercial era, when Messrs Blatter, Havelange and the dysfunctional took a chokehold on UEFA policy and sold the game we all love to the highest bidder. Television has made football mass-marketable, and the competition is not just about success on the field, but, more importantly, for financial dominance. Since the advent of the English Premier League, it has created a financial imbalance across the whole of Europe: poorer teams might be able to win a one-off game against anyone but in the long run the richer clubs will finish on top. Football before 1992 has become a memory that many fans would like to have back in their daily lives; the football experience felt more real, supporters were the beating heart of clubs up and down the UK. It might be a case of having our memories blurred in a nostalgic haze.

The proposals for a European Super League, whether it happens or not, feels like the final straw. The idea of the ESL breakaway came out of the insatiable logic of unconstrained capitalism: that you should always select the option that will result in the greatest net income. There is no doubt such ideas will continue to resurface, and while the proposed Super League may have stalled at its inception, it is unlikely to be the last we hear of it. Elite breakouts will become increasingly common in football unless the governing bodies fail to tackle their inherent contradiction in richly rewarding success while expecting meaningful competition to persist. So many, like myself, have turned our backs on elite football. I truly despise what it has become: outrageous wages, inflated transfers being demanded by pampered bang average players, diving, theatrics, cheating and VAR (which pundits now claim is part of the game) has sucked the lifeblood from football. It has become so sterile, and if you add into the mix empty stadia during the pandemic, it shows that the elite game is not the gold rimmed product that the governing bodies are trying to sell to the public.

Iceland's domestic football clubs will never make any monumental impact on the European scene; however, this is not a bad thing. Mainstream football has lost its identity; fans of the so-called elite clubs are leaving in their droves to support their local or non-league clubs at a fraction of the

price, they want to experience football in its purest form, where you are a valued supporter – not a customer. We can take solace in the smaller leagues and countries, where fans can get their weekly football hit. The Pepsi-Max Deildin is on par with the Scottish Championship/Division 1, there is decent football on offer to spectators. Icelandic clubs and volunteers are working tirelessly behind the scenes to improve a matchday experience, but throughout it all, Icelandic football is teetering on the very edge of mainstream consciousness, however, the Icelandic game maintains a vibrancy, diversity, and has a deep embedded necessity to the values of community roots. We wait with bated breath to see how UEFA's latest money-making conception "The Conference League" is going to affect the future progression and wellbeing of small clubs across the continent.

Football can be understood as a codified and institutionalized form of game-playing. The further addition of financial riches has produced an existential threat to the game, undermining the fairness within the competition that attracted us in the first place. It is the connectivity between all abilities that makes football the most watched sport on the planet.

The threat will be biggest for the most commercially viable clubs who are most at peril of eating themselves alive. We reminisce about the days of the three main European club competitions. An era when champions played in the European Cup, league performances were rewarded with a spot in the UEFA Cup, and when teams would bust a gut to win their domestic cup to enter the criminally underrated European Cup Winners' Cup, where Scottish and Icelandic teams would fly the flag against European giants. It is hard not to yearn for a return to those memorable European nights. Modern football has changed beyond recognition, the powers from above are even trying to stage the World Cup every two years. We all loved when smaller countries, around the world, qualified and had an element of mystique about them, now, before every major tournament, there is wall-to-wall analysis of every team; there was a level of romance attached to the idea of watching smaller unknown nations akin to El Salvador or Peru playing on the biggest stage possible. I will happily admit that I viewed football in the 1980s through rose-tinted glasses, even if I do recognise that the game, back then, was far from perfect.



HAMAR HVERAGERDI

A thirty-five-minute drive (south) from the capital sits the sleepy town of Hveragerdi. On what was my fourth visit to Hamar Hveragerdi, the weather gods were finally on my side, as on previous visits torrential rain seemed to be the normal forecast! The club, who play in the 5th tier of Icelandic football, have an impressive 'Marshmallow' shaped, heated, indoor hall, which was built in 2012 at a cost to the local municipality of £1.8 million. It is the main focal point for the small community which has a population of 2,400. Hveragerdi is famous for its geothermal activity; smoke erupting from the hot springs can be seen on approach, from the winding mountain-pass road, high above the town, as it sweeps across the steep undulating mountainside. Hamar play their home matches at Gryluvollur which is situated on the outskirts of the town. Spectacular views greet you as you navigate the single-track road to the pitch - the thundering river Varma runs adjacent to the road, there is even a waterfall on route which just gives more ambience when visiting on a matchday. The pitch always seems to be in pristine condition throughout the year. I was reliably informed that the playing surface is always immaculate due to the heat from the geothermal activity deep underground. The club pay the greenkeeper from the nearby golf course to keep the pitch perfectly manicured during the playing season. There hasn't been much in the way of notable success for Hamar, however, they won the league cup in 2016 which sparked jubilant scenes from their small band of fans in the 300 crowd at Samsungvollur.

They have made the 4th division play-offs in recent years as they try to gain promotion up to the third division. In 2021, they reached the semi-final stage but narrowly lost 2-1 on aggregate to Kormakur/Hvot.

On to the match itself: Hamar were up against SR (Skating Club Reykjavik) and needed a win to keep their play-off aspirations intact. A heavy smell of sulphur lingered in the air from the many hot springs, spouting, close to the ground. A crowd of around 100 gathered for the game with 30 or so fans taking advantage of the panoramic views high up on the craggy, moss-covered outcrop behind the dugouts. The silence and tranquillity that filled the valley was broken when the teams entered the pitch for the pre-match warm up as dodgy Icelandic hip-hop music blasted from the speaker system.

The Match - Isak Leo Gudmundsson reacted first in the box from a corner, his back heel evaded the SR keeper to give the hosts the lead after 8 minutes; Hamar failed to score again in the first half despite being in control of the match for large spells. On the hour mark, wing wizard Oliver Thorkelsson gave Hamar a two-goal cushion as he lobbed the ball over the onrushing SR goalkeeper. Kristinn Asgeir Thorbreksson ended the game as contest, two minutes later, as he slid the ball into the SR net, from close range, to give Hamar a well-deserved 3-0 victory and keep their promotion hopes firmly in their own hands. There can't be many grounds on the planet that you can witness a natural pyro show for 90 minutes.





UMF AFTURELDING



Lying 12 miles north of Reykjavik, in the shadows of the imposing Mount Esja, is the sleepy town of Mosfellsbaer. The sport most synonymous with the town has been handball and volleyball, however, in recent years there has been a quiet renaissance on the football front: UMF Afturelding have now become an established 1st division club and gathering momentum. There is a fantastic ethos and work ethic engrained within the coaching staff and players as the club goes from strength to strength.



Raggi Ola

There has been limited success at Afturelding since their formation in 1909, they are usually accustomed to playing in the mid-division leagues. They won the 4 deild championship in 1986 and went one step further when they were crowned 3 deild champions in 1999; it would be another 20 years before silverware came back to Mosfellsbaer – it was well worth the wait! Going into the final game day of the 2 deild season, in 2018, Afturelding, Grotta and Vestri were involved in a titanic struggle for the championship trophy; there was so much at stake as all three clubs could lift the cup depending on other results and permutations, and one unlucky side would miss out on promotion altogether. Afturelding travelled to Egilsstadir for a tricky match against Hottur, full of hope knowing a win would probably secure them the title. Grotta went into the last day showdown equal on 42 points with Afturelding; Vestri just 1 point adrift: it turned out to be an afternoon full of twists and turns.

After a nervous opening to the match, Afturelding went a goal down, against the run of play, when Daniel Kjartansson's piledrive strike, on 21 minutes, left Afturelding keeper Andri Thor Gretarsson clutching at air. This was not the start the away side wanted and things went from bad to worse as news filtered through that Grotta were 2-0 up and cruising in their match against Huginn, and Vestri were also winning their match in Akranes. Afturelding were languishing in third place by half-time and out of the automatic promotion spot. The Mosfellsbaer side had to dig deep for the final 45 minutes but came out

fighting and were rewarded when Andri Freyr Jonasson reacted first to pounce on a cross from the right wing and turn the ball into the net, on 56 minutes, as the Hottur defence struggled to clear their lines. This gave Afturelding a lifeline, however, their defence had to stay solid to nullify the Hottur forwards on the counterattack. With only 15 minutes of the match remaining, hitman Andri Freyr Jonasson evaded his marker to crash home his second goal into the roof of the net and send the 20 or so hardcore travelling Afturelding fans into delirium as the clock ticked down; it was backs against the wall for the remainder of the match as Afturelding clung on to a slender lead as the game raged from end to end. After some clever link-up play from the Afturelding midfielders, Wentzel Camban latched onto a through ball on 86 minutes, his strike from distance rocketed into the bottom corner of the net to give Afturelding breathing space. The tension around Vilhjalmsvollur was unbearable: all eyes were on referee Adalbjorn Thorsteinsson to blow his full-time whistle; moments later it went and Afturelding secured the biggest title win in their 109-year existence. Ecstatic fans, who made the 15-hour round trip from Reykjavik to Egilsstadir, were in party mode as they joined the wild celebrations on the pitch with the jubilant players and officials.

Afturelding and Grotta both ended the season on 45 points but the Mosfellsbaer slicksters had a five-goal advantage over their rivals - Vestri won their final match 2-1, but despairingly lost out on an automatic promotion spot.



“The whole coaching experience has been a huge learning curve”

- Magnús Már Einarsson: Manager, UMF Afturelding



AFTURELDING



What has been your toughest challenge since moving into management?

“The whole coaching experience is a huge learning curve for me. We have set an ethos and philosophy at the club which we all follow but must remain patient to achieve our long-term ambitions and goals. The pressure of being coach is much more intense than being a player, but it is something that I relish. I am lucky and privileged to be coaching my local team, and the structure and environment at Afturelding is getting bigger and better. My assistant coach, Enes Covic, has helped me a lot over the last two years with his wealth of experience. I played under him when I was younger, and we share a similar philosophy in football.”

How difficult is it for Afturelding to maintain Lengjudeild status?

“It is a big challenge, that is for sure! We have the lowest budget in the whole division, however, we performed well since arriving in the Lengjudeild and have adapted to our new environment. We work hard with our youth development system, which is paying dividends. We also have a fantastic team spirit with a never say die attitude. One of our major concerns is trying to keep our talented youth players who can be lured away to bigger clubs in Reykjavik. We have gained more points and scored more goals in each season so far. As a coach, I want to build on all the positives and expand our club.”

League restructuring caused a heated debate at the KSI AGM in 2020: What are your views on this?

“We need to play more competitive matches in a season, personally, I would like to see the top 2 divisions expand to 14 teams. Extra games in the league schedule could easily be played in June and July when the weather is much better; I would have no qualms about playing 2 games in seven days, I am sure all players at any club would agree. We have such a long pre-season; players would rather be on the pitch playing a match rather than constant training sessions. I think the top clubs will push for an immediate revamp next season; we must change the status quo for the league system to flourish.”

The transfer market – How demanding is it to attract players to Mosfellsbaer?

“I spent most of last winter looking for potential players abroad. The players have got to fit into our club ethos but also be able to adapt easily in Iceland, they have got to hit the ground running, it is vital we sign the correct targets. I looked at various countries for players, however, I have a good contact in Spain who we have used in the past, we got three Spaniards again this season with a wealth of experience playing abroad. I am delighted with their contribution to the club, but also to the community of Mosfellsbaer. They have played very well so far this season.”

What is your best moment as a manager?

“That has not come yet; I have enjoyed all our wins, the 7-0 win against Magni was a satisfying result. I’m ambitious, but there is still much more I want to achieve at the club.”

The Covid situation has had a detrimental impact. How has Afturelding managed to ease the burden?

“Our situation has not been as bad as what many other clubs have suffered, thankfully – mainly due to our increased sponsorship: we are grateful to the businesses in our area for the continued support, even in these most difficult of times, however, we are always cautious that we are not squandering money. Other clubs in Iceland are very dependent on match-day ticket sales, they have suffered badly as there was basically no fans allowed into the stadiums for a huge part of last season.”

Afturelding is sponsored by one of the biggest bands in Iceland. How did the partnership with rockers Kaleo come to fruition?

(A huge grin appears on Magnus’ face.) “We set up talks with the Lead singer, Jokull Juliusson, and our chairman, last winter, which were positive. I played with Jokull in my younger days at the club and know him since then. The Kaleo band members are from Mosfellsbaer and wanted to give something back to their community: we negotiated a two-year deal for their name on our shirts. We are delighted to have such a cool band sponsor our club. Shirt sales have gone through the roof, we have never sold as many shirts in the entire club’s history, this gives us another outlet for investment and at the same time raising Afturelding’s profile abroad. It is a lovely gesture from Jökull and Kaleo and we are delighted with their contribution.”

Is there any radical change would you make if you were the Chairman of the KSI?

“Our youth development system across Iceland is at a good standard up until U16 level; they can compete with some of the best Academy sides in Scandinavia and the UK, however, we do have issues in the U16-21-year-old age groups which in my opinion needs a major overhaul. There are many players in Iceland that are not physically ready for their respective first team squads in that age bracket, it is imperative we keep them involved in the game longer – whether that means give them more training or investing more resources with their physical progress. We are losing too many players who end up finding another hobby or interest as they become disillusioned by not making first team squads. This is a big dilemma which I have seen first-hand at Afturelding.”

How do clubs improve a matchday experience in Iceland?

“I must admit, clubs have been at the forefront of creating good days-out at football events over the past few years, they are bursting a gut to encourage more families to come and watch football. Catering at matches has been good, we are finding varying types of food on the menus, you can have a beer at quite a few grounds now - we need to look at the European concept for matchdays. I would like to see more activities for younger kids during a match. The Icelandic weather is problematic; I would like to see Afturelding have a roof erected at our stadium, this wouldn’t deter fans coming to watch a game if it is raining, we usually get 400 for a match if the weather is not so good, attendance figures will boost to 700/800 if the sun is shining.”





Hanna Simonardottir



FIVE YEAR RECORD

Formed: 1909

Chairwoman: Guðbjörg F. Torfadóttir

Ground: Fagverksvollur

Capacity: 700

Kit Supplier: Jako

Sponsor: Kaleo

2021

League: 10th (Lengjudeild)

Icelandic Cup: Last 32

2020

League: 8th (Lengjudeild)

Icelandic Cup: Last 16

2019

League: 8th (Lengjudeild)

Icelandic Cup: Last 32

2018

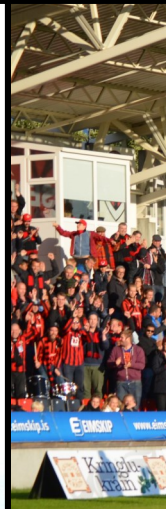
League: 2 Deild Champions

Icelandic Cup: Last 32

2017

League: 4th (2 Deild)

Icelandic Cup: 1st Round







Lofsöngur

Ó, guð vors lands! Ó, lands vors guð!
Vér lofum þitt heilaga, heilaga nafn!
Úr sólkerfum himnanna hnýta þér krans
þínir herskarar, tímanna safn.
Fyrir þér er einn dagur sem þúsund ár
og þúsund ár dagur, ei meir:
eitt eilífðar smáblóm með titrandi tár,
sem tilbiður guð sinn og deyr.
Íslands þúsund ár,
Íslands þúsund ár,
eitt eilífðar smáblóm með titrandi tár,
sem tilbiður guð sinn og deyr.

Ó guð, ó guð! Vér föllum fram
og fórnum þér brennandi, brennandi sál,
guð faðir, vor drottinn frá kyni til kyns,
og vér kvökum vort helgasta mál.
Vér kvökum og þökkum í þúsund ár,
því þú ert vort einasta skjól.
Vér kvökum og þökkum með titrandi tár,
því þú tilbjóst vort forlagahjól.
Íslands þúsund ár,
Íslands þúsund ár!
Vorú morgunsins húmköldu, hrynjandi tár,
sem hitna við skínandi sól.

Ó, guð vors lands! Ó, lands vors guð!
Vér lifum sem blaktandi, blaktandi strá.
Vér deyjum, ef þú ert ei ljós það og líf,
sem að lyftir oss duftinu frá.
Ó, vert þú hvern morgun vort ljúfasta líf,
vor leiðtogi í daganna þraut
og á kvöldin vor himneska hvíld og vor hlíf
og vor hertogi á þjóðlífsins braut.
Íslands þúsund ár,
Íslands þúsund ár!
verði gróandi þjóðlíf með þverrandi tár,
sem proskast á guðsríkis braut.





Tólfan



Tolfan (the official Iceland supporters club) was formed in 2007 by Styrmir Gislason, Grétar Örn Eiríksson, Joey D Bianco and Benjamín Halbjörnsson who were becoming increasingly frustrated with the sterile atmosphere at national team matches and decided to put a plan into action to improve a matchday experience. Styrmir had a meeting with the Head Coach at the time Eyjolfur Sverrisson and got the wheels turning, however, the supporters group lay dormant for a couple of years. Tolfan became an organisation with close connections to the KSI in 2011 after discussions with Lars Lagerback and Heimir Hallgrímsson ended with an agreement put in place with all parties concerned. It is no coincidence the national teams' performances have been extraordinary since Tolfan arrived on the scene, the supporters' group have helped provide a raucous atmosphere during home matches at the national stadium (essentially, becoming the twelve men, which is depicted on their supporters' shirts).

The group have steadily grown since their formation, they are extremely proactive and always looking at new ideas to give extra support for the national teams' cause. On matchday, the meeting point is the Olver Sportsbar (a 15-minute walk from Laugardalsvöllur).

There has been a ritual over the years that national team managers would turn up to the pub pre-match and speak to the group about the game ahead. Ex-Iceland manager Heimir Hallgrímsson explains "It certainly brought more harmony between players and fans. This could only happen in a country like Iceland where we all know each other, the meeting before the match seems unreal for most foreigners and I can understand why, but this is a sweet tradition that makes us a little bit different and gives a special, unique bond between players, managers and supporters."

Members within the group will use their expertise and creativity to design flags for matches, local sports company Henson have been sympathetic to the Tolfan cause; printing the materials at a reduced cost, which helps control the financial burden. The group are very welcoming and have extended a friendship with fans from German side St Pauli, who make an annual pilgrimage to matches in Reykjavik and also abroad. Another couple of football fanatics from the USA, Tom Conquergood and Joe Saladino travelled with the Tolfan members to all their matches in France during the Euro 2016 campaign, thus, creating long term friendships. The Tolfan hardcore congregate on section N of the east stand which was built in 1997.

Sven-Sveinn Ásgeirsson



Deep within the bowels of the national stadium, in the KSI boardroom I met up with Sveinn Asgeirsson, Borgvin G Bjorgvinsson and Birkir Olafsson (members of Tolfan supporters club) to find out more about the group who brought the Viking clap and a splash of colour to a global audience in recent years.

Sveinn took on the role of KSI supporter liaison officer in 2020, I asked him what his new position entails “I’m not really sure as we haven’t had the stadium fully open due the covid situation, we had a few nations league matches, but the crowd was limited to sixty fans, which were mostly made up of Tolfan members, at the moment there is a reduced capacity to conform with government guidelines, it could be a while before I find out exactly what I’m doing as the SLO.” There is a perceived logic that major football tournaments are solely for Europe’s big hitters, Iceland’s subsequent heroics at the Euros put the country firmly on the football map, overnight, the Nordic underdogs became flag bearers for small nations around the world. What has been your most memorable moment supporting his country? Sveinn ponders for a moment “When we drew 1-1 with the then world champions France at Laugardalsvollur in 1998 is up there! - On paper, it looked as if we might take a heavy beating, the stadium was packed out, there was even temporary seat terracing erected behind each end of the ground to increase the capacity, you couldn’t get away with that these days with UEFA’s strict stadium criteria. Rikhardur Dadason gave us the lead, but Dugarry scored an equaliser for the French, overall, all it was a tremendous team performance.” Iceland fans travelled in vast numbers to Euro 2016, with many of the Tolfan group intending to stay in France for the duration of all the group matches which was going to prove to be very expensive holiday, quite a few of the members were taking on part-time jobs leading up to the tournament to earn more cash to spend at the football extravaganza. The current Iceland squad is in transition at the moment, it could be a good few years before we see them grace another major tournament, I asked Sveinn if he expects a decrease within the membership at Tolfan? “Yes, I would imagine there will be a slight decline but there is also a social aspect to our group as many members are good friends and quite a few are actually workmates.”



Tólfan



Björgvi Borat-Björgvin G Björgvinsson

Following Iceland to away matches in Europe can be very expensive and also be a logistical nightmare. Bjorgvin replies, “Yes, it can be very difficult to plan these journeys, for instance, some of the lads went to Zagreb to watch Iceland in a World Cup play-off match, it was a case of in and out of the country on the same day to catch connection’s back home. Our members who can’t travel will meet in the Olver bar to watch away matches on the big screen and have few pints.” There are always potential flashpoints to be expected with rival supporters/ultras when visiting certain countries, have Icelandic fans ever been subjected to any intimidation or violence? “None that I can think of, we are all pretty much good natured, the police warned us about the Hungarian ultras before the match in Marseille, it was a bit hectic before the game, there was an edgy atmosphere when we walked past the ultras on our way to the ground but nothing too drastic happened.” What has been your favourite away day? (A huge grin appears on Bjorgvin’s face) “When we beat Holland 1-0 in Amsterdam on route to qualifying for the Euro’s was a memorable occasion, and also our win against Austria in Paris.”

I was lucky enough to meet up with Tolfan members Big Pete and Arni Thor Gunnarsson, for a few beers the day before Iceland played France in the quarter-final of the Euros in Paris, the positivity amongst the group is second to none, the lads just love talking about football, they have been on a whirlwind journey over the past decade and have got a taste for the big time, after being part of major tournaments. One particular moment stood out for me; The haunting sound of *ég er kominn heim* reverberating around colossal the Stade de France with 10,000 Icelanders slowly swaying side by side in the Paris drizzle; it certainly left a lump in my throat!

The Viking-Birkir Ólafsson



Flame haired Aberdeen fan, Birkir is a guy who is very passionate about the football and reminisces of a story when he was in France. “I was walking down by the harbour in Marseille wearing my Iceland shirt, minding my own business, and was suddenly dragged into a bar by Wales and Northern Ireland fans, when I was inside, they put me up on a table and the whole pub started singing in full-voice; (Shoes off if you love Iceland) then the bedlam erupted, there were shoes and trainers being hoisted in the air, it was a fantastic atmosphere, no animosity at all, needless to say, many beers were drank that day.” One of the defining moments at the tournament was when Arnor Ingvi Traustason scored a last gasp winner against Austria which propelled Iceland through to the group stages, (for tv viewers) it looked like absolute pandemonium in the Icelandic end of the stadium, “It was a feeling like nothing else, total ecstasy, just making it to the tournament was an experience, but going through to the knockout stage was never a thought in my wildest dreams.” Iceland also qualified for the World Cup, which was also a remarkable achievement, but there didn’t seem to be too much expectation when they arrived in Russia, they had been drawn in a very tough group and a number of Iceland players were in the twilight of their careers. “For us to qualify for the biggest tournament in world football was monumental, I’ll never forget the moment when the referee blew the final whistle at the end of our match against Kosovo, the old stadium (Laugardalsvöllur) was absolutely rocking.” Identity, belonging and meaning have enabled groups like Tolfan to preserve a cultural existence for the national team off the pitch as the group go from strength to strength.

***You can follow Tolfan on their Facebook or Twitter accounts.**



Tólfan

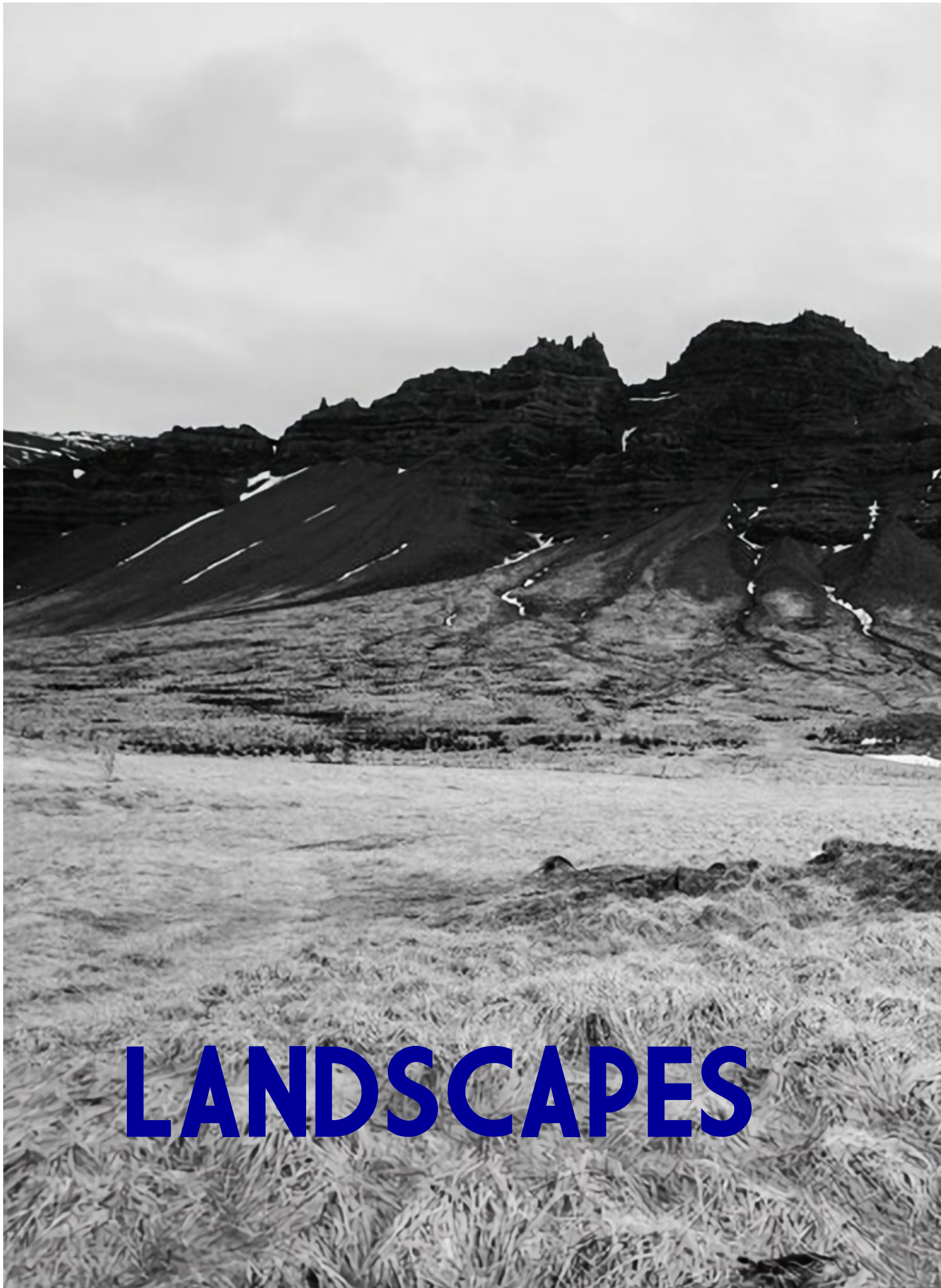
HUH



St-Etienne, Tuesday, 14th June 2016 at 21:00 CET, in front of 38,742 passionate fans and millions watching worldwide, Tólfan made their mark on the world stage: the first beat of the drum rang out as the Viking-clap crescendo reverberated around the arena. Football fans around the globe witnessed something unique at a major tournament – HUH.

AN ISLAND FAR AT SEA, THE EPITOME OF ISOLATION;
FUSED BY AEONS OF VIKING PASSION;
THEY COME AS ONE FROM AROUND THIS FROZEN LAND.
PROTECTORS OF THE FORT, THEY REPEL THE INVADERS;
A PHALANX OF FAN'S CLAD IN BLUE, STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER;
THE THUNDERING DRUMBEAT – SIGNALS ODIN'S BATTLE CRY.





LANDSCAPES







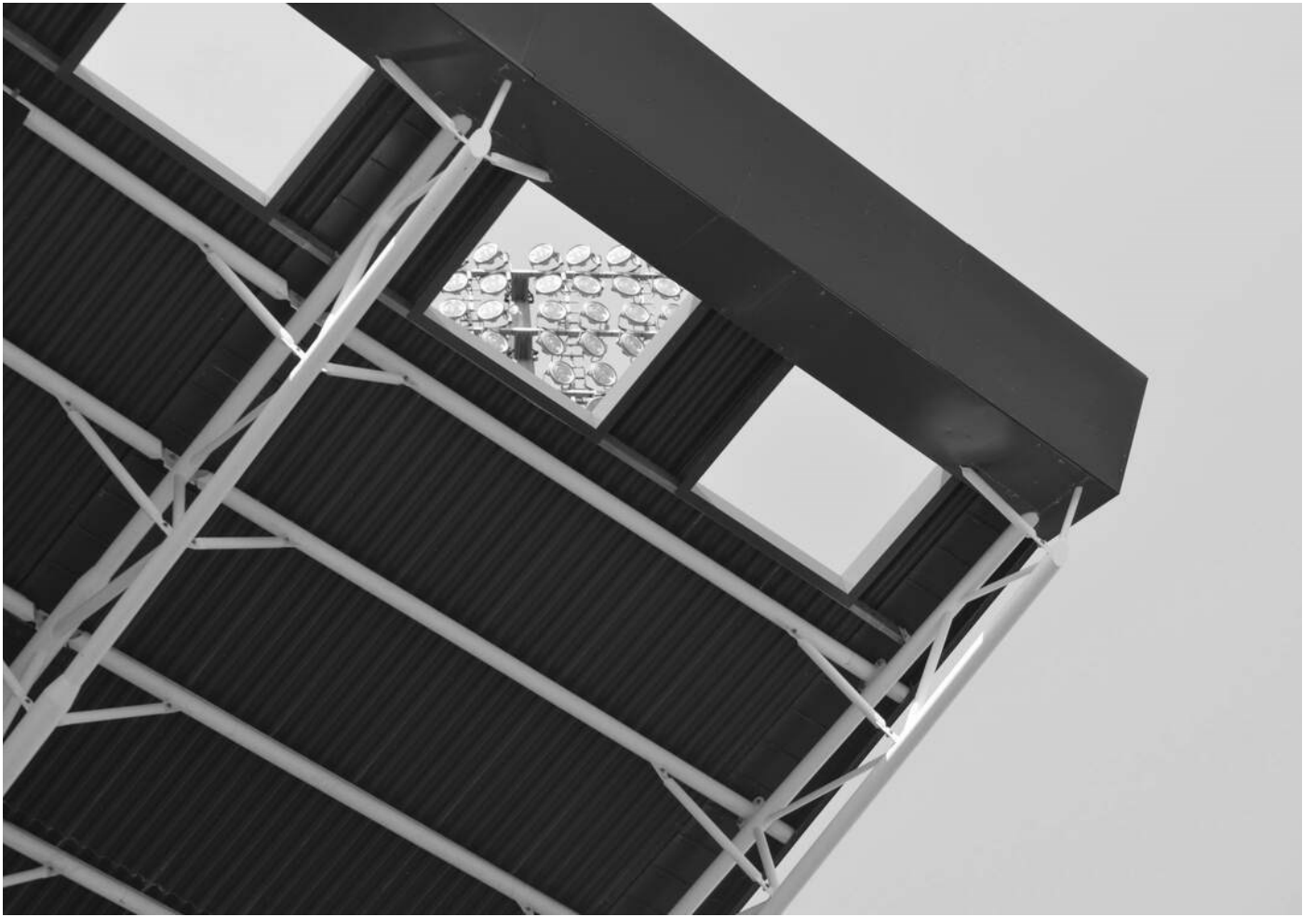
The beautiful coastal town of Grundarfjordur is situated in the north of the Snæfellsnes peninsula, on the deep-water fjord of Breidafjordur. Overlooking Grundarfjordur is the imposing Kirkjufell mountain which soars 463m into the sky and is certainly one of the most famous landmarks in Iceland. It is not unusual for photographers from all over the world to make their way to Grundarfjordur for the sole purpose of photographing this unique mountain that has appeared in several films. Grundarfjordur, which has a population of 872 hardy souls, is located 15 miles from the fishing hub of Olafsvik. Former league club HSH played in the Icelandic 3 Deild league tier up until 2002 before they went defunct. They managed only 2 victories in the final season of existence, however, HSH claimed a win in the last ever match at Grundarfjardarvöllur, beating fellow strugglers Aegir 4-1; Jonas Gestur Jonasson has the honour of scoring the last goal at the ground which lies on the outskirts of town.





LAUGARDALSVOLLUR









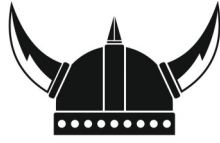




FULL-TIME



ISL





Following his first award winning book, *Sixty Four Degrees North* - Marc's fascination of Icelandic football continues. His travels have taken him to some of the most secluded clubs that exist on the very periphery of the beautiful game. This book is a pictorial celebration with over 125 photographs that capture the essence of Icelandic football.

Cut adrift from mainland Europe, Iceland is surrounded by the churning cauldron of the North Atlantic Ocean. A country which was largely anonymous in football terms, until the national team burst onto the international stage in 2015. Iceland is a natural wonderland where the freezing forces of glaciers and arctic weather are in a permanent battle with earth's explosive heat. The island is regarded by many as the final frontier of Western Europe. The raw beauty of cinematic vistas, glaciated snow-capped mountains, cascading waterfalls, lava fields, and brooding volcanoes provide a backdrop to clubs, with indecipherable names, that are the lifeblood to their communities.

The domestic lower leagues are still somewhat of an unknown entity, the game is largely amateur with top clubs only operating at a semi-professional status. There is a financial void restricting Icelandic football from advancing into a professional format, which in turn is having a detrimental effect on football evolving. Clubs, however, still remain resilient in the face of adversity.