

Michel Platini elected UEFA president

Michel Platini of France completed a transformation from European football legend to the continent's top official Friday when he was elected president of the UEFA, European football's governing body.

Platini won a secret ballot against Lennart Johansson of Sweden among the 52 member federations at the UEFA Congress with a 27-23 majority. Two votes were invalid.

Johansson was the first UEFA president in office to lose an election, ousted after 17 years on the job he has held since 1990.

The 77-year-old was bidding for a fifth term while Platini sought the top job for the first time.

Both hugged after the result was announced and Platini asked the congress to name Johansson honorary president.

Platini, 51, is the seventh president of the UEFA and the second Frenchman to hold the post, following Jacques George, who was in office 1983-1990.

'When I was a player and when we enjoyed a great victory, we were given a trophy and we celebrated together and ran around the pitch on a lap of honour. This is a great victory but today I am not running. This is just the beginning, the beginning of an adventure,' said Platini.

Angel Maria Villar Llona of Spain was elected UEFA vice-president, allowing Franz Beckenbauer of Germany to be chosen by acclamation as European representative into the executive board of the ruling body FIFA.

It is the first international job for Beckenbauer, who won the World Cup as a player and a coach and organised the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Beckenbauer had also toyed with the UEFA presidency, but did not run after Johansson decided to seek another term.

'We welcome him. We need the help of former footballers,' said FIFA boss Joseph Blatter about Beckenbauer.

Also on Friday, the congress agreed with a vast majority of 44 votes to conduct a feasibility study as to whether the European championships should be expanded from 16 to 24 teams in the future.

As a player, Platini captained France to the Euro 1984 title and was named European Footballer of the Year three times in a row 1983-1985.

He was the coach of France 1988-1992, vice-president of the 1998 World Cup organising committee, advisor to Blatter 1998-2002 and an executive board member of UEFA and FIFA since 2002.

'I took my time to prepare for the presidency. I am ready,' said Platini, who was publicly backed by Blatter.

Platini named the presidency 'a big adventure' and called for unity among the UEFA members, saying he needed the support of Johansson and the federations, which had backed Johansson.

The former footballer has pledged more places for smaller nations in the lucrative European Champions League, planning to strip the leading nations Italy, Spain and England of their fourth berth.

He also said he plans to spend more time during his four-year term at the UEFA headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland, than Johansson did in the past.

'I am looking forward to the cooperation with Michel Platini. We share the idea that football is firstly a sport and not a business,' said Blatter.

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