

Turks in the Swiss team

The Swiss Romand is home to 18,000 Turkish nationals, of which at least 2,000 are in Geneva including diplomats and international civil servants. Although few in number, the Geneva Turks await the arrival of their football team with impatience ... and also a certain amount of tension. Because their feelings are torn between their home team and that of their country of adoption. Even more so because some of the best Swiss players are also citizens of the Bosphorus: Hakan Yakin, Gökhan Inler et Eren Derdiyok, all three born to immigrant parents, defend the Swiss colours. All three players are the pride of the Turkish people in their country of origin.

It is a very small Turkish community which will welcome the Turkish football team to Geneva. For, if there are nearly 80,000 Turkish nationals in Switzerland today – 5% of the foreign population– around 80% of them live in the German-speaking part of the country. Geneva attracts the white-collar workers of Istanbul or Ankara; many of the employees of Turkish origin who work in the multinationals or the banks in Geneva coming from these cities. The Union Bank of Switzerland alone employs over twenty Turkish nationals. The commercial and investment bank and the Credit Europe Bank counts many Turks among their shareholders. Thus, one finds few Turkish popular associations in Geneva, in fact, none at all. “Because of their small number and their professional category, the Turks of Geneva have doubtless become integrated more quickly into the other communities of Geneva society” is the analysis of Refik Kiyamaz, director of the Swiss-Turkish chamber of commerce and industry. There do exist, however, in Geneva, “some more popular places, where Turkish workers meet after a day’s work to have a drink or play cards”, indicates Dr Kenan Sakbani a Geneva doctor of Turkish origin. One finds these bars with their traditional atmosphere by following the alluring smell of kebabs...

Switzerland – Turkey: A match of fair play?

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Turkish nationals and the Swiss team

The feelings of the Turks are torn between the two teams. All the more because some of the best players of the Swiss team originate from Turkey: first, Hakan Yakin whose exploits are recounted every week by the Swiss press. Born in Switzerland in 1977, this forward well known for his spectacular goals had the calibre for a foreign career. However, after two attempts – in Germany with VfB Stuttgart and in his country of origin with Galatasaray, - the player finally headed the Berne team Young Boys which has subsequently enjoyed a phenomenal renaissance.

Next, the centre Gökhan Inler. He, too, made an aborted attempt in Turkey playing for several months with Fenebahçe Istanbul. “A childhood dream” explained at the time this ‘secundo’ (second generation), wishing to revive his parents’ Turkish past. And, finally, the new hope of Swiss football, Eren Derdiyok. The young attacker, who will be 20 during Euro 2008, made his international début last February at Wembley, where he took only twelve minutes to score his first goal against England.

“Kubi” the Turkish-Swiss hero

Every Turk, whether in Switzerland or Turkey, knows these players and follows their careers with interest”, says Refik Kiyamaz. For the Turks of Switzerland, the success of their fellow countrymen in the national team is considered a model of integration. The most famous of these models remains the brilliant goal chaser Kubilay Türkyilmaz. Born in 1967, the son of Turkish immigrants, he was at first not liked by the Swiss public because of his diva behaviour, but he became adored for his role as saviour in the national team. “Kubi”, as the Swiss nicknamed him, retired in 2001. With 34 goals to his credit, he remains Switzerland’s best goal scorer and the most popular Turk in the country.

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