

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF PEMBROKE ATHLETA

Honourable Prime Minister Dr. Lawrence Gonzi, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Parliamentary Secretaries, and Members of Parliament, Mayor of Pembroke and Councilors, UEFA President, Mr. Michel Platini, MFA President, Dr. Joe Mifsud, parents and other distinguished guests, and our young players for whom this occasion is being commemorated, we welcome you all to our club.

We are celebrating today, not only, the opening of our new turf pitch and the floodlighting system, but also the spirit and hard work of our volunteers, who dared to dream and make this dream a reality. People from different levels of education and strata of society, were joined together by a single theme. The aim was to make a football ground for our young athletes with all the facilities available where our youngsters have the opportunity to become great footballers. Who knows we might find another Michel Platini in our midst?

The problem was where to begin. Eight years ago after the outgoing President Mr. Gino Cauchi decided that the football section of the club will not anymore pay remuneration to our players; our club attracted only those players who played football for the love of the sport, and the badge that they were representing.

The need for our own football ground became urgent and thanks to the intervention of our Honorary President Dr. Francis Zammit Dimech, this need was satisfied, together with the financial help and support of the Ministry of Sport and the Ministry of Works. Mention must also be made of our Honorary President Evarist Bartolo who has always been a staunch supporter to our cause.

We also had the priceless help through the UEFA hat-trick programme for the installation of the UEFA mini-pitch which came to our rescue. The joy of watching children enjoying themselves in a safe environment is beyond description. This pitch was overworked for many months with children playing football, volleyball and basketball non-stop. At this point one must not forget the invaluable help we had through various private funding and the Local Council.

Words cannot describe the hard work of volunteers, coaches, parents, players and committee members who all gave a great helping hand. Pembroke Athleta Club prides itself as being primarily a family club, where all the family can participate in various sports activities, where women and young girls found a niche since we were one of the first clubs to have female players in our nursery. We have a team of dedicated coaches who compliment our hard-working committees. Most of our coaches, who are working on a solely voluntary basis, hold a UEFA 'B' or 'C' license. They give a holistic education to our players and instill in them principles of integrity and fairness.

Without this help, the cost would have been exorbitant and way beyond the resources of the club.

Since Pembroke is a fairly young community the club had no financial resources to fall back on to. So when our strategic planning revealed that a FIFA two start artificial turf pitch would cost over €300,000, our ambitions seemed impossible. At the time all our resources and energies were centred on our main project which was in excess of

€2,000,000 and we were looking into how we could find a solution to meet the required investment.

This is when we started working on two projects at the same time. The Malta Tourism Authority Embellishment Project for Tourism through the intervention of the Local council and the UEFA Hat-trick Programme. The project with the Malta Tourism Authority has funds available from the Ministry and the EU but is on hold because we are still waiting for our MEPA building permit.

With the goodwill displayed by the Kunsil Malti Għall Isport and various Government Ministries, most notably the Ministry of Finance who through its VAT Refund Scheme and the Good Causes Fund, we managed to bridge most of the difference between the UEFA Hat-trick Programme funding and the final costs

The Hat-trick Programme is a blessing to football in Malta. Many small clubs such as ours, will mean that our players will from now on, enjoy the benefit of practicing football from a young age to adulthood on one type of surface.

This benefit to Maltese Football is beyond words or description. Mr. Platini, I thank you, your executive committee and colleagues, in the name of all Maltese Clubs who are benefiting from these programmes. Also you have made us realize that for the UEFA, we, the small clubs, are also important. Mention must be made of our MFA President, Mr. Joe Mifsud, and the board, for the extremely hard work they did, and investments that the MFA had approved for our clubs, from its own resources. Due to these investments we are seeing resurgence in the availability of turf facilities to footballers in Malta. We take the opportunity to thank Messrs 240 Limited and their Lano partners for providing us with good quality workmanship, materials and support.

Special thanks go to the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, and also to the Parliamentary Secretary for Local Councils and the Pembroke Local Council for upgrading and cleaning the area around our sports club. The parents of the club greatly appreciate the new street lights installed, the parking facilities and the gardens and trees that were planted. These were a much needed improvement.

At this point it is very important to thank everyone and anyone who in some way contributed to make our dream a reality.

Now, where do we go from here? When our MEPA building permit is finally issued, we will, along with our Malta Tourism Authority partners, hopefully, in just twelve months, finish the nine-a-side turf pitch, the parking area and the surrounding gardens. In the meantime we will be planning our final investment, which will be the sports complex. It is planned that this will have two gyms, a squash court and other sports facilities with a multi-purpose indoor court.

We hope that new partners who will share our dreams will be forthcoming and will help us to make them a reality.

We once again thank our distinguished guests for braving our cold winter weather to join us in our celebrations.