

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?



Siggi Eyjolfsson

Technical director/coach education director

Women's national team head coach

The Football Association of Iceland



Where is Iceland?



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?



Icelandic premier league 2006

1. FH
2. KR
3. Valur
4. Keflavík
5. Breiðablik
- 6.ÍA Akranes
7. Víkingur
8. Fylkir
9. Grindavík
10. ÍBV (Westman Island)

Icelandic football - facts and figures

Population of Iceland:
approximately 300.000

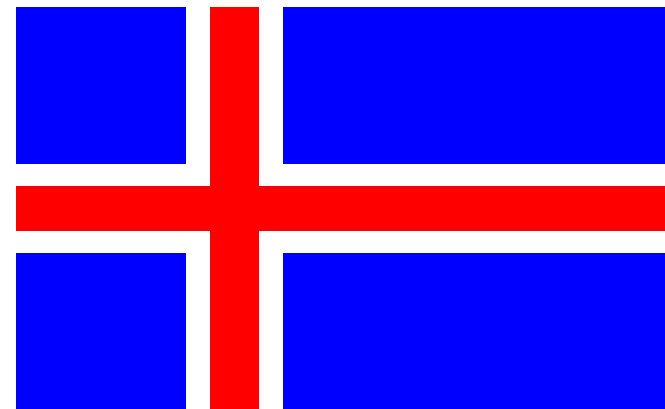
Registered players: 22.100
(7,4%)

Number of clubs: 90

Number of teams: 816

Number of coaches: 327

Semi-professional premier
league





Sources: UEFA first division clubs in Europe 2006-2007 and
Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2006 (population jan 1st 2006)

Country:	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>	<u>Iceland</u>
Total population	5.427.000	5.255.000	4.640.000	9.048.000	300.000
# of men at age 5-34	1.024.100	979.800	925.600	1.709.900	67.400
# of men players registered	389.254	110.791	352.515	418.995	16.400
% of all men age 5-34 playing football	38%	11.3%	38.1%	24.5%	24.3%

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?



Sources: UEFA first division clubs in Europe 2006-2007 and
Nordic Statistical Yearbook 2006 (population jan 1st 2006)

Country:	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>	<u>Iceland</u>
Total population	5.427.000	5.255.000	4.640.000	9.048.000	300.000
# of women at age 5-34	990.800	937.100	891.600	1.634.500	64.500
#of women players registered	93.929	19.944	98.158	136.327	5.700
% of all women age 5-34 playing football	9.5%	2.1%	11%	8.3%	8.8%

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Teitur Thordarson, head coach KR, ex head coach at Lyn, Brann, Lilleström...

"What surprised me the most when I came to Iceland was how many young players you have with great potential. The country is crowded with them and it can't be explained except through the tremendous interest the nation has for football."

(Frettabladid, Nov, 5th 2006)



Teitur Thordarson continued...

"It does not matter how many people live in Iceland, you don't need a nation of 20 million people to make good football players. Iceland has developed surprisingly many good players in the past and it has drawn attention"

(Frettabladid, Nov, 5th 2006)



Teitur Thordarson quote

"It is the dream of every Icelandic football player to become a professional player abroad, and the dream carries them on. The Icelandic boys have a different attitude from the boys abroad. They are willing to work harder to succeed"

(Frettabladid, Nov, 5th 2006)



What is so special about Iceland?

Longest pre-season in the world (7 months)

The shortest football season in the world (May 20th - September 30th).

Yet we have a player playing regularly for European champions Barcelona

7 players with English Premier league clubs

One of the best goalkeepers in Norway

2nd highest goalscorer this season in Norway

The leading goalscorer in Sweden in 2005 etc.



Tränarsymposiet, Örebro 2007

Our professional players playing abroad:

Who are they and where are they playing?

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Icelanders who have played professionally for Örebro

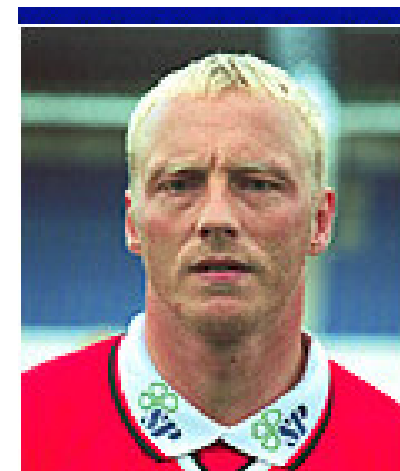
Sigurður Jónsson

Arnor Gudjohnsen

Hlynur Stefánsson

Hlynur Birgisson

Gunnlaugur Jonsson



Icelandic professionals in England

**Hermann Hreidarsson,
Charlton**

Heidar Helguson, Fulham

Emil Hallfredsson, Tottenham

Ivar Ingimarsson, Reading

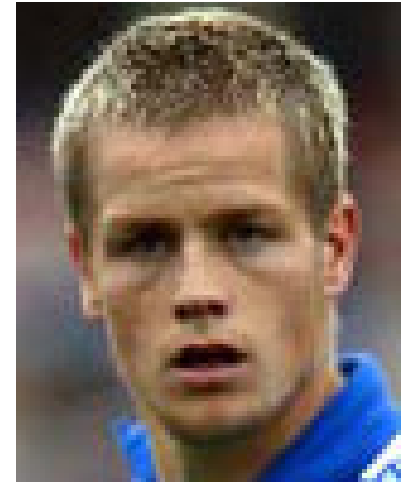
**Brynjar Bjorn Gunnarsson,
Reading**

**Bjarni Thor Vidarsson,
Everton**

Rurik Gislason, Charlton

Gylfi Einarsson, Leeds

**Olafur Ingi Skulason,
Brentford**



In Spain

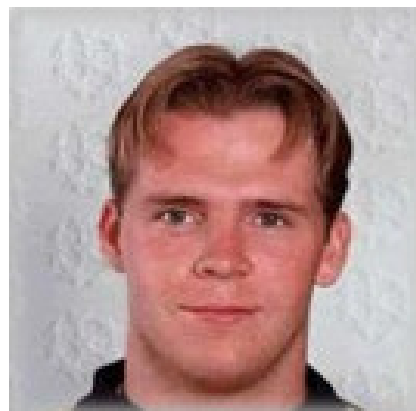
**Eidur Gudjohnsen,
Barcelona**



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

In Norway

Armann Smari Bjornsson, Brann
 Arni Gautur Arason, Vålerenga
 Birkir Bjarnason, Viking
 Olafur Orn Bjarnason, Brann
 Kristjan Orn Sigurdsson, Brann
 Veigar Pall Gunnarsson, Stabæk
 Johannes Hardarsson, Start
 Haraldur Gudmundsson, Aalesund
 Stefan Gislason, Lyn
 Indridi Sigurdsson, Lyn
 Marel Baldvinsson, Molde
 Viktor Bjarki Arnarson, Lilleström
 Gardar Johannsson, Frederiksstad



In Sweden

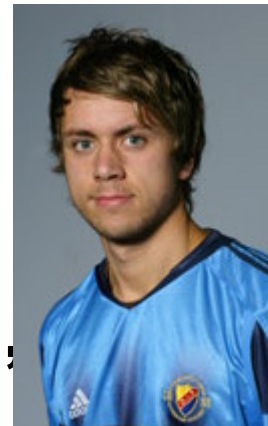
Ari Freyr Skulason, Häcken

Kari Arnason, Djurgården

**Solvi Geir Ottesen,
Djurgården**

**Hjalmar Jonsson, IFK
Göteborg**

**Gunnar Thor Gunnarsson,
Hammarby**



Helgi Valur Daníelsson, Öster

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Leifur Þ. Gudmundsson

In Denmark

Bjarni Olafur Eiriksson, Silkeborg

Hannes Þ. Sigurdsson, Brøndby

Holmar Orn Runarsson, Silkeborg

Hordur Sveinsson, Silkeborg

In Germany

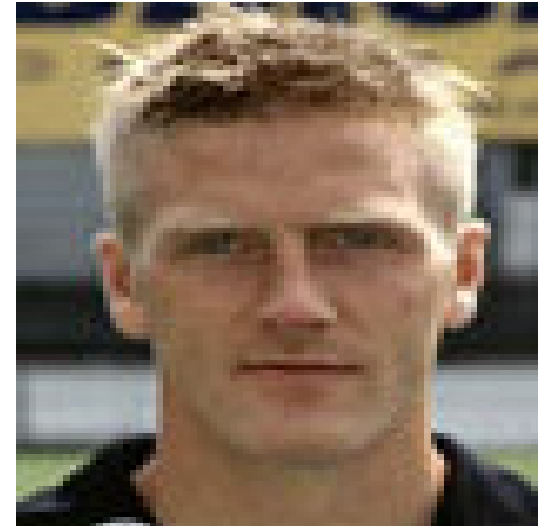
**Gunnar Heidar
Thorvaldsson,
Hannover 96**



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

In Belgium

Runar Kristinsson, Lokeren



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

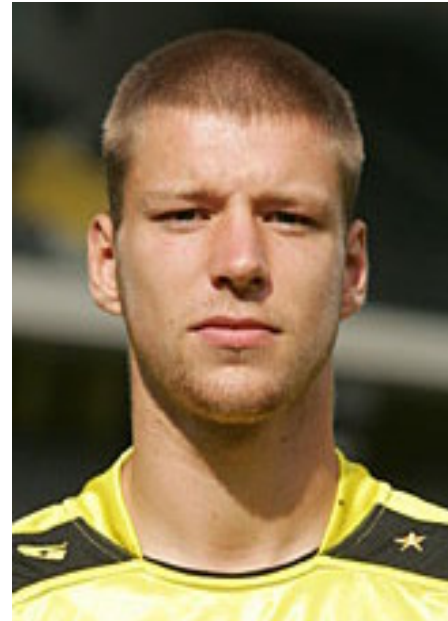
In Holland

**Gretar Rafn Steinsson,
AZ Alkmaar**

**Johannes Gudjonsson,
AZ Alkmaar**

**Arnar Thor Vidarsson,
Twente**

**Bjorn Jonsson,
Heerenveen**



In Scotland

Hjalmar Thorarinsson, Hearts

Theodor Elmar Bjarnason, Celtic youth

Kjartan Henry Finnbogason, Celtic youth



Women's professional players playing abroad

Asthildur Helgadóttir, Malmö FF, Sweden

Björg Bjarnadóttir, Klepp, Norway

Dóra Stefánsdóttir, Malmö FF, Sweden

Erla Steina Arnadóttir, Mallbacken, Sweden

Margrét Lara Vídarsdóttir, Duisburg, Germany



Icelandic youth players playing with professional clubs

Gylfi Thor Sigurdsson, Reading

Arnor Smarason Heerenveen

Aron Einar Gunnarsson, AZ Alkmaar

Ingolfur Ragnarsson, Brøndby

Marko Pavlov, RC San Francisco Mallorca

Oddur Gudmundsson, Esbjerg

Oskar Petursson, Ipswich

Eggert Jonsson, Hearts

Haraldur Bjornsson, Hearts



The characteristics of the typical Icelandic professional player

Works hard

Listens to the coach

Adjusts well

Learns the language

Has leadership qualities

In surprisingly many cases he becomes the captain of his club

Icelandic professional players who have been captains at their clubs

Arnar Thor Vidarsson, Lokeren, Belgium

Eidur Gudjohnsen, Chelsea, England

Asgeir Sigurvinsson, VFB Stuttgart, Germany

Gudni Bergsson, Bolton, England

Hermann Hreidarsson, Charlton, England

Ivar Ingimarsson, Reading, England

Runar Kristinsson, Lokeren, Belgium

Eyjolfur Sverrisson, Hertha Berlin

Janus Gudlaugsson, F.C. Köln

Petur Marteinsson Hammarby, Sweden

Larus Orri Sigurdsson, Stoke City





A few possible reasons why Iceland produces so many professional players...

Icelandic players cost less in many cases

Solid athletic background from young age

The nation as a whole works very hard

Football is the number 1 sport in Iceland. Football culture.

Qualified, paid football coaches, coach the kids from age 5-6 and up.

The level of coach education is high

A great number of our coaches at all age groups are physical education teachers with football background

Open door policy at all clubs for all age groups except the first team

Everybody can play for their favourite team!



Number of training sessions for the typical Icelandic player

6-10 year olds = 2-3x per week

10-14 year olds = 3-4x per week

14-18 year olds = 4-6x per week

Adults = 5-8 times per week

Additional training:

We have educated physical education teachers
teaching sports at school 2x per week (age 6-19)

All children must learn how to swim 1x per week (age
6-17)

Specialities for Iceland +

Qualified, paid coaches are working with players of all ages (even kids)

We are few so we should be able to focus on working with the individual

Our facilities have improved dramatically

We have players that are willing to train hard without financial gain

Our coaches are well educated

Specialities for Iceland -

Lack of money

The location of Iceland expensive to play
international matches

The football season is very short

The weather/facilities

No professional teams

Few players to select from



Tränarsymposiet, Örebro 2007

How good are the Icelandic national teams?

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

The U-17 men's team...

Our U-17 men's national team has advanced to the elite round of the UEFA U-17 Championship

It means that Iceland U-17 is one of the top 28 teams in Europe (out of 48 teams).

We are by far the "smallest" nation that advanced.

Results against Sweden:

Iceland-Sweden 2-2 (2005)

Sweden-Iceland 2-1 (2001)

Iceland-**Sweden** 1-3 (2000)

Iceland-Sweden 2-2 (1999)

Sweden-Iceland 1-1 (1998)

Sweden-Iceland 6-0 (1996)

Sweden-Iceland 7-0 (1995)

Iceland-**Sweden** 1-2 (1994)

Iceland-**Sweden** 0-4 (1994)

The U-19 men's team...

Our U-19 men's national team has advanced to the elite round of the UEFA U-19 Championship

It means that Iceland U-19 is one of the top 28 teams in Europe (out of 50 teams).

We are by far the "smallest" nation that advanced.

Results against Sweden:

Sweden-Iceland 2-0 (2006)

Sweden-Iceland 1-4 (2005)

Iceland-Sweden 2-0 (2005)

Iceland-Sweden 2-2 (2005)

Iceland-Sweden 0-0 (2001)

Iceland-Sweden 2-2 (1968)

Iceland-Sweden 0-0 (1966)

Sweden-Iceland 10-0 (1967)

The U-21 men's national team

Results against Sweden:

Sweden-Iceland 1-4 (2005)

Iceland-Sweden 3-1 (2004)

Iceland-Sweden 1-0 (2000)

Sweden-Iceland 1-0 (1995)



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

The men's A national team

Results against Sweden:

Iceland-**Sweden** 1-2 (2006)

Sweden-Iceland 3-1 (2005)

Iceland-**Sweden** 1-4 (2004)

Iceland-Sweden 2-1 (2001)

Sweden-Iceland 1-1 (1995)



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?



Icelandic men's A national team - notable results

Iceland - France 1-1 (1998)

Iceland - Russia 1-0 (1998)

Iceland - Czech Republic 3-1 (2001)

Mexico - Iceland 0-0 (2003)

Iceland - Germany 0-0 (2003)

Iceland - Italy 2-0 (2004)

Italy - Iceland 0-0 (2005)

Iceland - South Africa 4-1 (2005)

Iceland - Spain 0-0 (2006)

Northern Ireland - **Iceland** 0-3 (2006)

Women's youth national teams

Iceland will host the UEFA championship final tournament at the women's U-19 level in July 2007.

Great experience for our U-19 women's national team.

At the women's U-17 level we have struggled for the last few years.

At the women's U-21 level we do well.

The Icelandic women's national team

Number 21 in the world
(FIFA ranking)

Number 14 in Europe

Notable results:

Sweden - Iceland 2-2 (2005)

Russia - Iceland 1-1 (2003)

Iceland - Italy 2-1 (2001)

USA - Iceland 0-0 (2000)



An interesting point!

"All the best players from Iceland through the years have come through the clubs in the countryside"

Ásgeir Sigurvinsson, Iceland's A-national team head coach, radio interview, Iceland, 2005



A case study -ÍA Akranes Football Club



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

A case study -ÍA Akranes Football Club

Akranes is a small town with population of 6.000.

Around 1.000 men are football age (5-34)

Have competed in the premier league for 58 years out of the last 60.

18 times Icelandic champions
9 times Cup winners





Players who have come straight from ÍA Akranes and turned professional abroad (30 players in 30 years)

1976 **Matthias Hallgrímsson**, Halmia
1977 **Teitur Thordarson**, Jönköping
1978 **Karl Thordarson**, La Louviere
1978 **Petur Petursson**, Feyenoord
1980 **Sveinbjorn Hakonarson**, Grimsas
1984 **Sigurdur Jonsson**, Sheffield
Wednesday
1985 **Bjarni Sigurðsson**, Brann,
1985 **Gudbjorn Tryggvason** Start
1988 **Olafur Thordarson**, Brann
1990 **Adalsteinn Viglundsson** B1909
1992 **Arnar Gunnlaugsson** Feyenoord
1992 **Bjarki Gunnlaugsson** Feyenoord
1993 **Pórður Guðjónsson** Bochum
1995 **Arnar Gunnlaugsson**, Sochaux
1996 **Bjarki Gunnlaugsson**, Mannheim,

1996 **Stefan Thor Thordarson**, Öster
1996 **Haraldur Ingolfsson**, Aberdeen
1997 **Bjarni Gudjonsson**, Newcastle
1997 **Arnar Gunnlaugsson**, Bolton,
1997 **Haraldur Ingolfsson**, Elfsborg
1998 **Gunnlaugur Jonsson**, Örebro
1998 **Johannes Karl Gudjonsson**, Genk
1998 **Steinar Adolfsson**, Kongsvinger
1998 **Thordur Thordarson**, Norrköping
1999 **Siggi Eyjolfsson**, Walsall,
1999 **Stefán Thor Thordarson**, Ürdingen
2000 **Johannes Hardarson**, Groningen
2004 **Julian Johnson**, B68,
2005 **Gretar Rafn Steinsson**, Young Boys
2005 **Stefán Thor Thordarson**,
Norrköping

ÍA Akranes

No club has produced more leading goalscorers in the Icelandic premier league (26 times)

Typically 90-95% of ÍA's squad are players born and raised in Akranes

The club also typically has one of the best youth teams (16-18 year olds)

In 1993 Icelandic champion ÍA Akranes beat Dutch champions Feyenoord in Iceland 1-0.

ÍA Akranes had 8 homegrown players in the starting lineup.

6 of them went on to play professionally.



How is this possible for such a small town?

Football tradition, football culture

Great work ethic

Support for football from local authorities

Hardly any room for other sports

Young players have always been given a chance to play for the first team

Professional players from the town become role models and the cycle continues

Like father like son...



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

ÍA Akranes training ground



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

ÍA Akranes- Full size indoor football hall



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

ÍA Akranes - football stadium



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

A case study Grindavík's football facilities

Grindavík - Premier league team in Iceland from 1995-2006.

Total population in the town of Grindavík: 2.697

Stadium seating capacity: 1.750

Are in the process of building a 60x80m indoor football field (artificial grass).



A case study - Icelandic Professional Ívar Ingimarsson - Reading, England



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

A case study - Icelandic Professional Ívar Ingimarsson - Reading, England

Grew up in Stöðvarfjörður,
Iceland, population: 236

Nearly always played with
older boys

13 years old when he started
playing regularly for his club's
first team in the Icelandic 4th
division

At age 16 he moved to
Reykjavík

Had by then played for
Iceland's U-16 national team

Played for Valur and ÍBV for 4
years in the premier league

Played for the A-national
team at age 20.

Had trials at Bristol City,
Norwich, and Watford but
they were not interested

Played on loan for 3rd
division team Torquay

Spotted by Brentford in 2nd
division - they bought him.



A case study - Icelandic Professional Ívar Ingimarsson - Reading, England

Played every single minute in 46 matches as a central defender for Brentford in 2001-2002.

Bought by 1st. division club Wolves, then went on loan to Brighton.

Bought by 1st division team Reading in October 2003

Player of the season at Reading in 2004-2005

Played every single match in the starting line-up in 2005-2006 for Reading.

Reading set a new English record, 106 points and gained promotion to the English Premier league

A case study - Icelandic Professional Ívar Ingimarsson - Reading, England

Reading is currently 9th place in the English premier league

Ívar Ingimarsson is the captain of the team

He is one of 31 players in the English Premier league who has played every single match this season

Voted 2nd best Icelandic football player of 2006 (Eidur Gudjohnsen, Barcelona being number 1)

What's next?

So what can we learn from Ívar Ingimarsson and his career??

A case study - Icelandic Professional Ívar Ingimarsson - Reading, England

Ívar is the typical
Icelandic player
Not the best talent
Does not have a very
special skill
Works very hard to
improve
Model professional
player
Great attitude

Leadership qualities
Captain
His work ethic has
spread out throughout
Reading
Always played with an
age group above
Comes from the
countryside - small town,
not from Reykjavík

To create good players you need good coaches
To create good coaches you need
good coach education

So what is the status of our coach education?



Coach education in Iceland 2004 The study

B.S. thesis in exercise and sport science from Kennaraháskóli Íslands Íþróttافرæðisetur, Laugarvatn, Iceland (Sports University).

Authors: Eypór Guðnason, Kristinn V. Jóhannsson, Óskar Atli Rúnarsson.

How did they do it?...

Every single coach was included. We wanted 100% accurate results.

Coach education in Iceland 2004 - results

- There were 327 football coaches coaching in Iceland for the 2004-2005 season (not counting assistant coaches).
- These 327 coaches were coaching at 90 clubs and were in charge of 800 teams.
- The youngest coach was 16 years old.
- The oldest coach was 54 years old.
- The average age for an Icelandic football coach is 32 years.
- The most common age for a coach is 36 years.

Coach education in Iceland 2004 - results

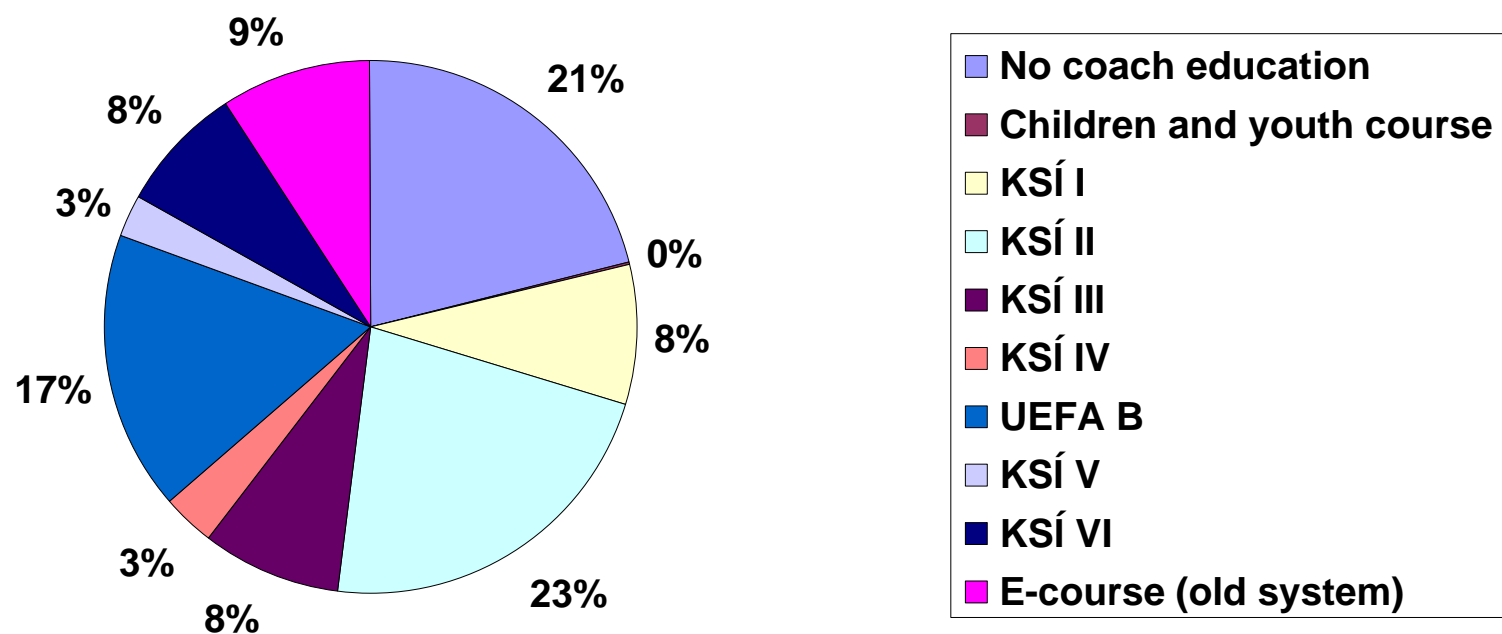
36.4% of all these coaches had the UEFA B coaching licence or more coach education than that!

21% of the coaches had no coach education at all - however...

We now have personal information in our database for every single coach who was coaching in Iceland in 2004-2005.

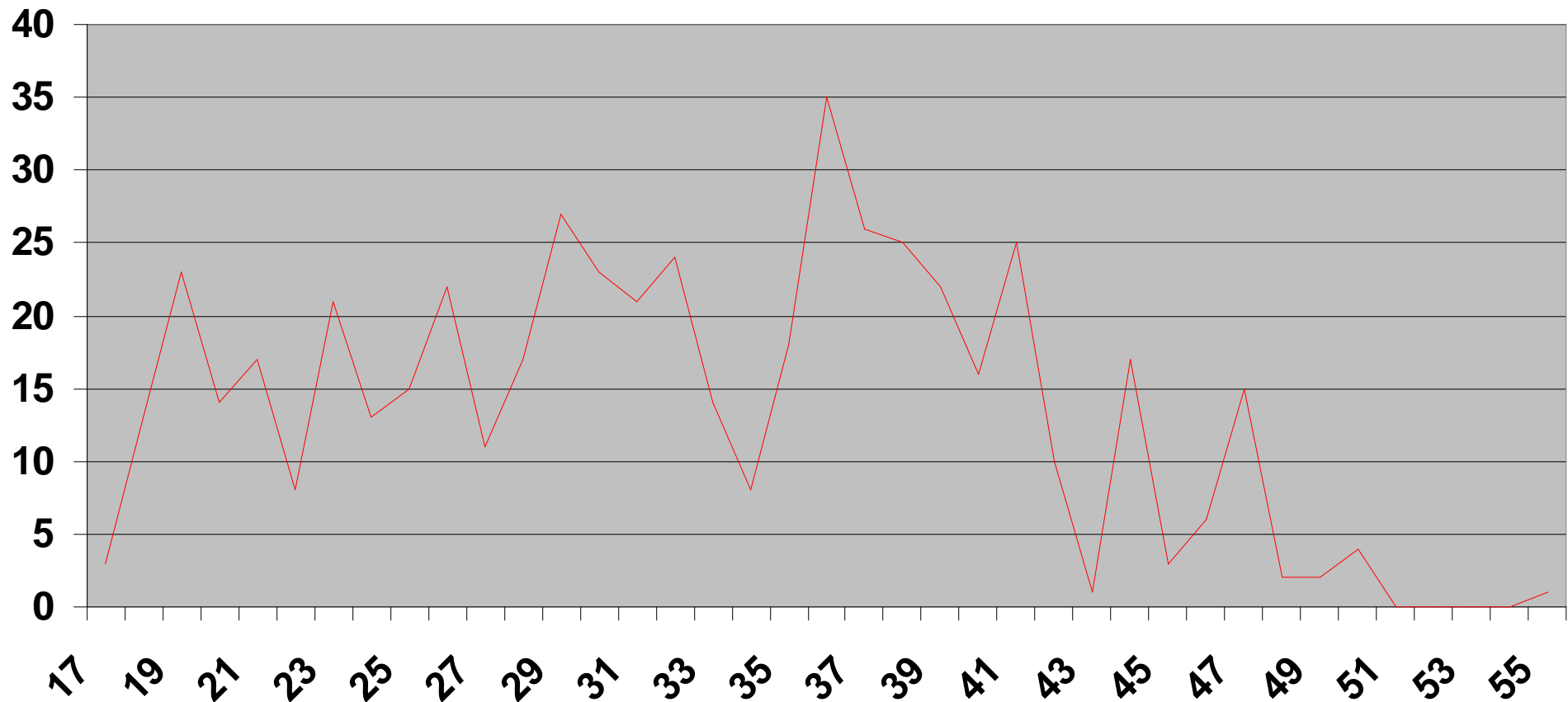
That means: Full name, identification number, full address, name of club, what age group he/she was coaching, E-mail address, and mobile number (GSM).

The education level of all active Icelandic coaches 2004-2005



Age distribution of Icelandic coaches 2004

Number of coaches at different ages



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Practical implications

We can now send e-mails to every active coach in Iceland. Very useful for coaching courses and other information we need to get to them.

We now have statistical information on the coaching profession, e.g. how many, how old, male/female ratio, level of education at all levels and age groups etc.

Other major findings

Our old coach education requirements were largely fulfilled. It was time to set new requirements for coach education.

We changed for example our requirement for women's 2nd highest division from KSÍ I (26 hours) to UEFA B licence (124 hours).

General results told us that men had more coach education and coaches of older age groups had more education than coaches of younger age groups.

Repeated study ongoing now

The study allows us to compare data.

What is the level of dropout in the coaching profession?

Will there be an increase in the coach education level?

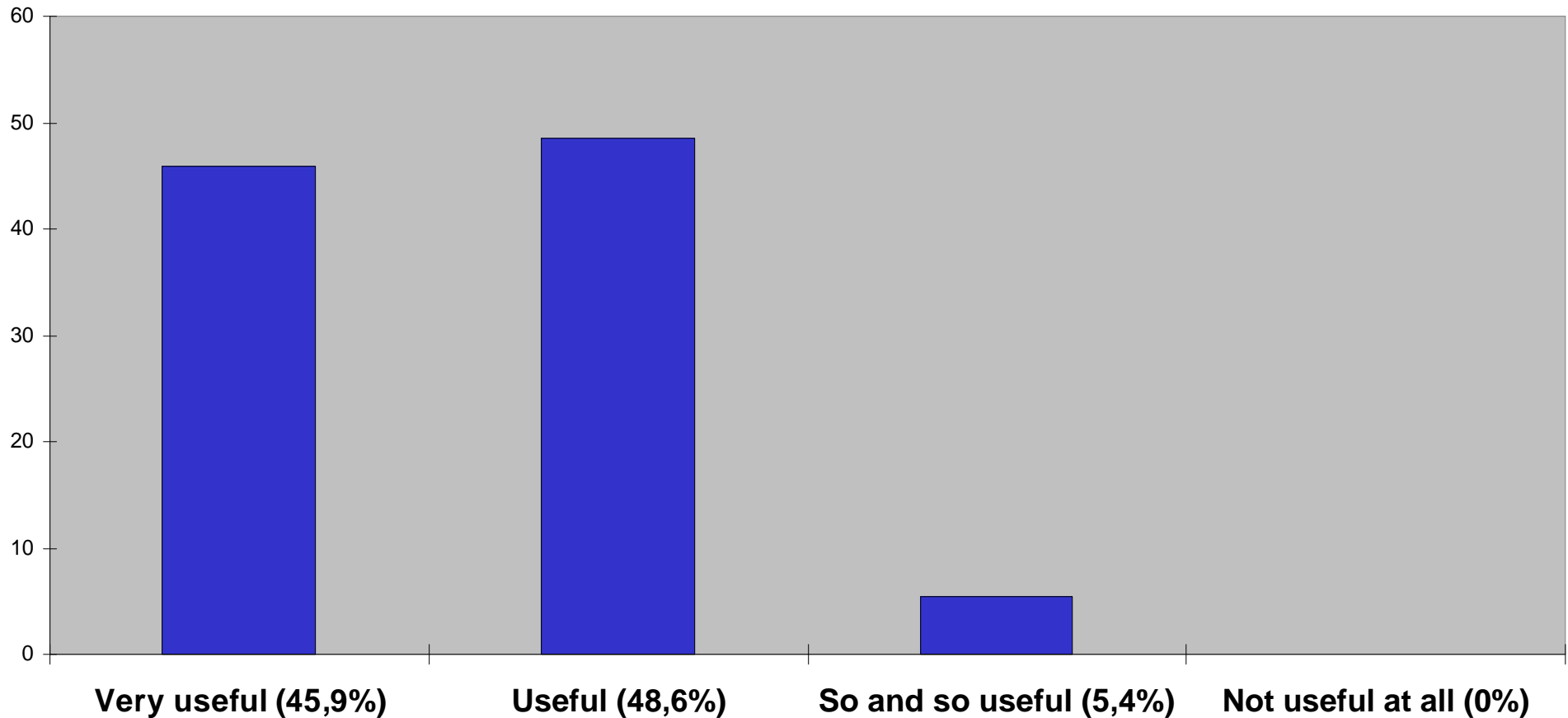
Will we get 50% of our coaches with the UEFA B licence?

Will the average age of the coaches increase?

Will we get more females into coaching? etc.

The new study will include every single football coach in Iceland, including assistant coaches.

How useful did you find the course (KSÍ IV 2005)?



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Player development...



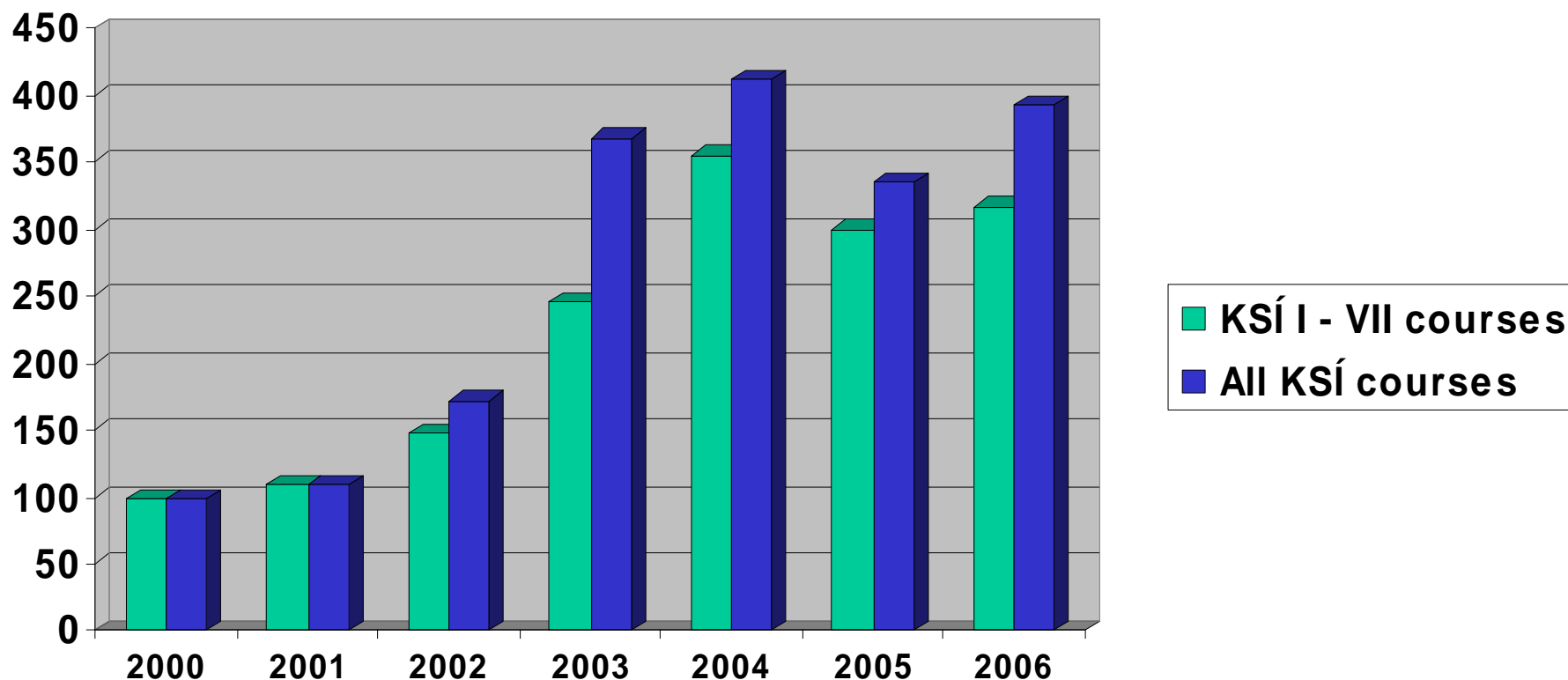
How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

How do we produce players...?

Here are some important steps we have taken in improving Iceland's player development...



Coach education: Number of coaches attending our coach education courses 2000-2006





We have made coach education mandatory

We have made coach education mandatory in the top two leagues for all coaches who are coaching men's teams (club licencing).

We recommend the same coach education requirements for coaches in the women's game.

Facilities: Much better facilities for playing football!



6 full size indoor football fields built since the year 2000.

The facilities are used by all age groups.

Facilities: 17 astroturf pitches all around Iceland



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

Facilities: 76 mini-pitches built on school grounds all around Iceland, since 2004



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

35 more mini-pitches will be built in 2007



How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

How we are working on player development...

Clubs have recently started to focus more on developing their talented players

Establishment of Football Academies

We have prolonged the football season by playing the league cup inside the football halls.

Clubs have started to employ head coaches and goalkeeper coaches



How we are working on player development...

12 teams in each of the
top 3 leagues from 2008
= more matches

Link-ups with foreign
clubs

Better quality coaching

More football players
than ever before



We have + and -

We have better educated coaches

We offer more coaching courses than ever before

We have much better facilities than before

We have more football players than ever before

Coaching is a profession at all levels in Iceland, it puts a higher standard on the coaching.

Children don't exercise as much

Street football has decreased

Some of our clubs are too crowded

Too young assistant coaches?

Too many players per coach?

Not enough emphasis on developing the best players?



Source: UEFA Convention on the mutual recognition of coaching qualifications, (updated January 26th 2007)

Country:	<u>Denmark</u>	<u>Finland</u>	<u>Norway</u>	<u>Sweden</u>	<u>Iceland</u>
Number of UEFA B coaches	551	5?	3133	1815	237
Number of UEFA A coaches	232	16	420	590	22
Number of UEFA Pro coaches	25	34	25	49	1
UEFA B/ # players	1 UEFA B coach per 765 players	1 per 22.158 players	1 per 113 players	1 per 231 players	1 per 69 players

How can Iceland produce so many professional football players?

In the end...

Our dream is to reach the finals of a major tournament. We have never accomplished that.

Through hard work, anything is possible.

Look out for our women's national team!

Thank you for your attention!

Siggi Eyjolfsson

Technical director/coach education director

Women's national team head coach

The Football Association of Iceland

Laugardalsvöllur, Laugardal

104 Reykjavík,

Iceland

siggi@ksi.is