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# Georgia: football, an economic and social driver

## Description

**Football is one of the most popular sports in Georgia, alongside judo, martial arts, rugby, and basketball. Although the stadiums attract an average of less than 3,000 spectators per match in the first division, the country's passion for football remains strong, especially for matches involving the national team.**

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The Crystalbet Erovnuli Liga, the top division of the Georgian league, is played over a calendar year and comprises ten teams, who play each other four times in a total of 36 rounds. Dynamo Tbilisi, Georgia's most successful club with 19 national titles, regularly tops the league. However, the performances of Georgian clubs on the European stage remain limited, with many eliminated from the play-offs for European competitions. According to the UEFA Index, a ranking system that evaluates the performance of football leagues across Europe, the Georgian league is currently 46th out of 55. Despite this, progress is being made thanks to training, enabling local talent to develop.



## The blossoming of Georgian football

Georgian football has a rich history, with Dynamo Tbilisi enjoying its golden age between the 1960s and 1980s. They won two Soviet championships and the Cup of the Cups in 1981, marking a significant milestone in the sport's development. Torpedo Kutaisi and Dynamo Batumi, with four league titles and their first championship in 2021, respectively, complete the top three of the most prestigious clubs. The recruitment of star striker Kvicha Kvaratskhelia by Dynamo Batumi in 2022 was a momentous event that further solidified the sport's place in Georgian culture.

Dynamo Tbilisi also dominates the Georgian Cup with 13 titles, although the competition has become more unpredictable since 2016, with four different winners since then. This diversity reflects a growing competitiveness among Georgian clubs.

Supporters of the leading clubs, such as the Black Sea Pirates of Dynamo Batumi and the fans of Torpedo Kutaisi, are known for expressing their political positions, often marked by intense opposition to Russia and full support for Ukraine. The stands provide a forum for political and social demands, reflecting the geopolitical tensions in the region. This extreme politicization is typical of Central and Eastern European countries, such as Ukraine and Serbia, where political affiliation (sometimes even to ultra-political groups) allows people to position themselves in the political landscape, sometimes with contrasting views.

Georgia has always been a breeding ground for footballing talent, even during the Soviet era. After independence, players such as Kakha Kaladze, Shota Arveladze, and Levan Kobiashvili, current President of the Georgian Football Association, left their mark on the history of Georgian football. Under the leadership of L. Kobiashvili since 2015, the national team has seen significant improvement, culminating in a historic qualification for Euro 2024 under the management of Willy Sagnol.

[Georgia now boasts promising young talents](#) such as Napoli's Kvicha Kvaratskhelia, Metz's George Mikautadze, and Valencia's Giorgi Mamardashvili. These players illustrate the progress made in youth training, supported by the academies of international clubs such as Inter Milan.

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## An unexpected economic impact

Football [significantly contributes to the Georgian economy](#). In the first quarter of 2024, [international tourism revenues reached \\$807.7 million](#), thanks partly to sporting events organized in the country. This economic boost is a testament to the growing popularity and success of football in Georgia, promising a bright future for the sport and its impact on the country's economy.

In addition, the strategic development plan initiated in 2015 by Levan Kobiashvili, which includes projects such as the construction of 37 stadiums (plus 18 still under construction), has increased the number of registered players and the television audience for Georgian football. This ambitious plan, divided into five pillars: the stability of selected football, optimizing infrastructures, developing young talent, promoting women's football, and increasing community involvement, has shown significant results. For instance 2015, there were 14,000 registered players and 120 female players in the women's teams; six years later, there were 37,900 registered players and 1,000 female players. According to UEFA, the number of spectators watching the national league has also increased considerably, with 200,000 spectators in 2017 and 2.7 million in 2022.

[Georgia was able to measure the impact that football could have on its economy for the first time in 2015 when it hosted the UEFA Super Cup match](#). This major football event boosted the Georgian economy in several ways: firstly, 13.6% of the match's spectators traveled on the national airline, Georgian Airways, which suddenly found itself in the limelight, just behind Turkish Airways, in terms of transporting fans. In addition, 70.8% of visitors stayed in hotels in the city, and 8.6% stayed in accommodations rented from private individuals. On average, tourists remained in the country for 4.5 nights. Moreover, 27.7% of tourists had even bought holidays from operators to visit the country. According to surveys, 97% of tourists were delighted with their experience and recommended Georgia as a tourist destination.

## An undeniable social role

Football in Georgia is not just a sport but a tool for social development. It offers young Georgians a structured activity and opportunities for personal growth. This kind of activity, which has become commonplace and natural in Western countries, is widely seen in Georgia as a tool to help young people lead healthy lifestyles and avoid falling into delinquency or crime. [As in the case of Colombia, where the 'Fútbol con Corazón' program allows thousands of children to escape violence](#), Georgia uses football to bring young people together and promote positive values. In Colombia, this sport has helped to reduce delinquency by almost 90% in certain high-risk areas, an example that Georgia can follow to inspire its young people.

Football in Georgia also opens doors to educational and professional opportunities for young talent. Following the example of initiatives in Latin America, where football has enabled many young people to escape poverty and violence, budding Georgian footballers benefit from scholarships to study and play abroad, with a view to various careers.

Georgia was also one of the host countries, along with Romania, for the Euro U21 (European Under-21 Championship) in 2023. Georgia's performance was promising, with a quarter-final elimination on penalties against Israel, but an impressive group stage. They finished top of their group ahead of teams like Portugal and the Netherlands.

Football now plays a crucial role in Georgia's economic and social dynamic while at the same time forging a strong and resilient national identity, with the slogan "*I am Georgia*," for example, helping young people to feel represented on the international stage. Their team's successes had helped Georgians, young and old, to feel united, for example, [when they qualified for the Euro in April 2024](#) or reached the last 8 of the Euro after beating Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal. The Georgian team dazzled world commentators with attractive football and a game plan based on quick counterattacks led brilliantly by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and George Mikautadze. Recent successes and development initiatives promise a bright future for Georgian football, both nationally and internationally.

**Thumbnail:** © [Dynamo Tbilisi](#).

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