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PLEASE WORLD: Julia Stehniak shows her bann



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'Football is a platform

where we can speak

about Ukraine, about

Prague's epet Arena. Possibly mirroring the war effort, the Ukrainians are tiring; they dominate Albania for the opening 55 minutes, fade right out of the game and lose 1-2.

Something similar happens as they lose 2-3 to the Czechs.
Their fans, brash, bright, hopeful on both nights begin

tiring too, of a team made up of players doing very well at very big clubs who, seemingly, can't handle the weight of the Ukrainian shirt.

has

I'm here with their football team for a home game with Al-

complicated

outbreak of war.

Not least as 'home' is now places such as Leverkusen, Munich, Stuttgart, Poznan and Wrocław.

The war continues and the Supporter Julia Stehniak is deeply concerned about the war, the continuing death toll. the future, and sees the foot-ball team as a chance to get

Ukraine's plight on to TV.

She passionately pushes the motto which will flash all around the blue-and-vellow bannered ground 'Stronger To-

"It is important we are here. seen to be together and strong," says Julia, "important for Eusays Julia, "important for Europe to see this and how we are strong in different places because we need help to proare strong in different places because we need help to protect our skies, otherwise we will and starring at Benfica, is posterior and starring at Benfica, is posterior than the Furgue.

Test

HOME and away, war

LET LIKRAINE STRIKE BACK

and peace, Ukraine foot-**FOLEY** been since February 2022 and the

lose a lot of people, soldiers and

bania and an away game with Czech Republic, both at Sparta there was a huge missile attack and many people died in other

"It is every day and I am very disappointed at the world just not supporting us properly. The support, sometimes it seems just words.
"I think the world can do

more. It is easy, everybody says human lives are the most important thing in the world and that 'everyone protects human

"But less than 1,000km from the heart of Europe everybody can see the things that are going on and they don't act.

"They say they are afraid they say the Russians won't accept the sharp answer to their aggression, they say we support democracy and human rights and we must protect the people team and the fans, all looking to do their bit, are at a low ebb. who are in captivity, the womer who are being raped?

Wrong

"It is a poor help so if the world thinks they are protecting human rights and protect-ing democracy, the world is

It's not that there any weaknesses about the Ukraine foot-ball squad per se: Serhiy Re-brov, formerly of Dynamo Kyiv, Spurs and West Ham, is one of the most famous Ukrainian

inder in the Europe there is Arsenal's Olek-sandr Zinchenko, o Vialiv Mykolenko o Ever-Viktor Tsygankov who is at Girona; and Ruslan Malinovski of Genoa.

Mykhailo and now lympiacos missed ury, started against Czech Republic. Yet almost all of

them are wilting under the turmoil, the pres-sure, as their nation is every occasion.

Boghdan Antokhov from Dnipro, close to the fighting in the southeast of country, is diserformances.

"Evervone knows we are in, and have been in, a war but it is really portant for us to show

"I really want us to get us up to Nations League A to send our message to the world but the None of the players show up

win against a very poor Albania the table in front of him. "We side although three days later played well but at the back Al-

side in the second-half and I

Pride It is far from Shakespeare's St

allowed out of the country be-

special permission and all that world where we stand, how we kind of thing. Hence, our agency has picked up the gig bemore heart on the pitch, fight

Bodhan Tsapiv was hoping some of the Ukraine players will come and talk with the

"I live in the west of the lost their children, their farms,

more stronger." Worse

Anastasia Pariychuk studies at the dance academy in Prague and she sees the situation in her homeland as getting worse "month by month" "Wkha

"month by month."

Last night Ukraine were at ost their children, their farms, heir homes.
"Unfortunately I suppose this Czech Republic in Wrocław."

tion to the country's plight.
"We must show all of the people that we are all together. I'm from Lviv which is getting increasingly under attack. My parents are still in Ukraine and

Dmytro Mykhaliev and Dmitro Babin have left their homes near Donetsk in occupied east-

ern Ukraine for the Czech Re-"Ukraine is united like it had

Babin is far more pessimistic: "The only way is to fight it back, I don't think there will be peace at the moment — I can't see the Crimea, Donbas or Luhansk provinces simply being be that would help get Ukraine over the line in the face of playhanded back by Russia.

Support

"I hope that Europe will be more involved. Everyone there seems to be looking for excus- attract so many fans. es. But everyone in Ukraine is looking for more support, more

looking at Ukraine it is like a grandfather thinking 'Oh just stop fighting and make peace'.

"It is far more complicated

can tell that if these matches were at home, there'd be even

ing all of these matches away.

"It's been good in the sense that there is still support because it's a poor team results-wise which makes it harder to

"The UAF are doing the best,

for example, Prague, where there's over 500,000 Ukrainians in the Czech Republic.

"It's good that they attracted so many fans and, fingers

on the team: "We're coming into the third year of this and you other than that, it was pretty poor and the question is ho will it get better?" Julia Stehniak is not confi

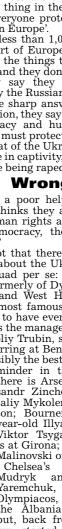
dent for the immediate future.

"I don't think this war will end soon. I wish, but I don't see the light, the end of this time such wrong bloodshed.

"If you are talking about 'peace' the way some Europeans see it, that is Ukraine just

giving up the land they have fought for, I can't really answer that, the Ukrainian soldiers they must answer this question

from America, I hope Kamala Harris wins the US election



Ukraine team carrying huge weight of expectations

team is uncontrolled, the coach

games last year; Milan, Brati-slava, Chisinau, Warsaw, every Ukrainian match I try to visit.

post-Albania interview is deliv-ered in a tent in Prague where there is just one teenager eating

afterwards either "We didn't make the chance to "It was a hard match for us," drones Rebroy, staring hard at

Crispin's Day speech as delivered by Henry V before Agincourt, or 'Where's your f**king pride?' as Ciaran Fitzgerald famously ex-horted in 1985, against England, spurring Ireland on to a thencarce Triple Crown

cause I live in London.'

(the players did not): those fathers and mothers who

war will last a lot longer, this action will be freezing and then matches such as these allow Tryzub symbol (three-pronged become hot but essentially it. Ukrainian fans attract atten- spear) representing the number

we can speak about Ukraine, talk about what is happening. "Here were can show the

I worry about them, the war is spreading month by month."

never been united before," says Mykhaliev. Football inspires us. "My town is in the fighting and I have had this large yellow and blue flag made especially, it is styled as an Ameri-