UEFA Case Study
TEAMWORK
HOW CITYWEST WELCOMED THE
2019 UEFA UNDER-17
CHAMPIONSHIP

Citywest Hotel is accustomed to hosting major events. But in 2019, one stood out as a unique challenge due to its scale, visibility and ambition.

The UEFA Under-17 Championship gives the footballing superstars of tomorrow their first serious taste of international competition. In May 2019, Ireland hosted the Championship for the first time with 16 teams competing over a two and a half week period.

For the entire event, Citywest Hotel was the teams’ base. This was the first time in the Championship’s history that a single property housed all the players. Consequently, an unparalleled level of partnership between the hotel, UEFA, the Football Association of Ireland, the teams and many others was required.

Despite being Ireland’s largest hotel with 754 bedrooms, Citywest Hotel faced a massive challenge. However, by 19th May when the final was played, the hotel and its staff had won universal praise for their hospitality, flexibility and efficiency.

Here’s how this was achieved...

Background preparation and planning
Ireland was chosen as the location for the 2019 UEFA Under-17 Championship in December 2016. While the Football Association of Ireland’s successful bid had included Citywest Hotel as an event partner, only a certain amount of preparation could be done in the sixteen months before the first-round draw.

This took place at the Aviva Stadium at 8pm on 4 April 2019. Within minutes of hearing details of the first-round schedule, Citywest’s management team started making practical preparations to welcome teams on 26 April.

Room allocation was the most basic consideration. Although Citywest knew how many rooms were needed and each team’s arrival times, players’ names were not shared until the last minute. In some cases, information about exact room requirements was also not confirmed until the day of the team’s arrival.

THE 2019 UEFA UNDER-17 CHAMPIONSHIPS:
• 16 national teams split into 4 groups
• 512 staff and team members staying at Citywest Hotel
• 7 match locations: Dublin (4 separate pitches) / Longford / Bray / Waterford
• 32 matches
• 106 goals scored

NUMBERS TO NOTE
• 25,000 meals served over three weeks
• 1st time all tournament teams were accommodated in one property
• >6500 hotel room nights
• >46,000 total attendance at matches across Ireland
• 2800 kg of ice used
Despite the last-minute aspect of this, all teams were accommodated together and were provided with the meeting and kit rooms they also required.

UEFA covered the cost of ten twin rooms for players plus six single rooms for staff members. However, some teams needed more space with one bringing 22 staff members in addition to its playing squad.

**Site inspection**

Before the final draw was made, the planning team had divided the hotel into colour-coded blocks showing room allocations for ‘Team A,’ ‘Team B’ and so on. Within hours of the actual draw on 4 April, specific countries were allocated to these room blocks.

The following morning, representatives from all 16 teams were given separate tours of Citywest Hotel where they could review the block they had been assigned. With so many taking place, split-second choreography was essential. Each member of the hotel’s senior management team was assigned a team and their individual tour times were staggered to ensure that they didn’t overlap.

Teams had to be shown their proposed rooms, told about the dining arrangements, shown how meeting rooms would be organised and given a full tour of the Leisure Centre and its facilities.

**MAKING ROOM:** the challenge of creating space for everyone

While some teams found the basic allocation of rooms adequate, others needed more space. In all cases, expectations were met and each team was accommodated in its own area of the hotel.

The hotel’s Computer-Aided Design system helped achieve a result that satisfied everyone. Using colour-coded visualisations, each team could be shown exactly where they would be staying.

Each team block also required a kit room and a medical room. These were created by clearing the existing furniture from bedrooms and re-equipping as required. Some teams also needed extra rooms for planning sessions and other purposes which led to further bedrooms being converted.

Overall, 50 rooms had to be completely cleared, with furniture from each tagged so it could be returned to its correct location. The physical challenge of moving such a huge number of items and finding storage space became one of the hotel’s biggest and most unexpected challenges during the 2019 Championship.

More ambitiously, UEFA also needed four dedicated meeting rooms. This led to the redesign of four bedrooms; not only was existing furniture replaced with meeting-style tables and chairs but each room’s lighting was modified to create a more business-like ambience.

**SATISFYING APPETITES:** feeding teams while controlling costs

One of the most challenging aspects of hosting the 2019 Championship was satisfying the different dietary requirements - and appetites - of 16 world-class teenage football teams.
Managing the menu

Ten months prior to the 2019 Championships, UEFA submitted an extensive menu plan covering all meals for the three weeks of the event. This was designed to match the very precise nutritional needs of teenage footballers. However not long after arriving, players began asking for more variety. In response, Citywest Hotel agreed with the FAI and UEFA that the menu plan would be reevaluated after the Group stages.

Despite having a master menu plan, the dietary preferences of individual teams also had to be managed. In reality, this meant minute-by-minute changes to the menus were constantly made during the tournament.

For example, one team may not have wanted butter while another would say no to eggs. To cover these preferences, the hotel’s catering team had to work incredibly quickly and responsively, sometimes making up to thirty different changes to the menu each day.

Specific ingredients were also requested by some teams. Portugal and Italy brought their own chefs with them as members of staff and both required particular ingredients. Working alongside the Citywest Hotel catering team led by Head Chef Ciaran Cunningham, both teams’ chefs struck up a very positive relationship with their Citywest colleagues.

Serving made simple

Managing the physical serving of meals during the Championship also needed careful planning.

In November 2018, Citywest hosted the Republic of Ireland, England, Germany and Czech Republic during a friendly preparation for the 2019 tournament. During this, the hotel discovered that offering separate buffet stations for each team was the most efficient way to serve meals. The approach was taken the following April and worked equally well.

Although they served themselves from their own team buffet, all the countries shared the large same dining room. This stimulated interaction between teams, something that UEFA actively encouraged.

As the tournament progressed, the numbers using the dining room naturally declined. It was suggested that the remaining teams could move to a smaller space. However, they vetoed the idea as no one wanted to make any changes that might disrupt their positive momentum.

Controlling costs

The budget for the master menu was agreed between Citywest and UEFA before the Championship kicked off. Any variations or extras requested by individual teams were then paid for by the teams themselves.
FOCUS ON FITNESS: giving international teams access to world-class facilities

Not surprisingly, every national team was keen to maximise their access to Citywest Hotel's 20m pool, studio and 10,000 m² gym. In particular, players used the pool to aid rehabilitation after tough matches.

Although the Leisure Centre's facilities are extensive, they're not unlimited. A schedule therefore had to be agreed that gave every team daily access without inconveniencing the Leisure Club's regular members. UEFA and the FAI were advised of the specific times that the gym, studio and pool would be available to each team.

Overall, the teams were very impressed by the quality of equipment and the willingness of the Leisure Centre to help. While each country brought their own gym instructors, one team requested a Spin class. At short notice, the Leisure Centre was able to arrange for an instructor to take the team through their paces.

KEEPING COSTS UNDER CONTROL

Mirroring action on the pitch, the Under 17 Championship was a dynamic, fast-paced event for Citywest Hotel.

While serving the needs of hundreds of players and staff was paramount, it was also essential that all costs were constantly monitored and controlled.

Initially, the FAI submitted a forecasting document with which Citywest Hotel calculated an overall cost. This was based on a per-person rate rather than the hotel's usual per-room rate. However, the real challenge was to ensure complete transparency by monitoring all extras so that everyone knew who was liable for individual costs.

From the beginning, the FAI ensured that each team was clear as to exactly who could approve extra charges costs such as snacks, drinks and laundry. 'Live' items could only be requested and signed for by the Team Liaison Officer (TLO) who would discuss the expense with a counterpart from Citywest Hotel.

Day-by-day monitoring and meeting

The most useful tools for maintaining control were daily review meetings:

- At 9.30am, an Operational Meeting was attended by UEFA, the FAI and Citywest Hotel at which everything to be done that day was agreed.
- At 10.30, Citywest Hotel managers attended an internal Hotel Review Meeting to consider team requests made by teams and the day's other logistical issues.
- Finally, the hotel gave a daily update of all costs incurred to a FAI representative. This happened at an 11.30am Budget Review Meeting.

By maintaining strict controls and constant monitoring, no billing enquiries were made by any of the teams following the Championship – an almost unprecedented outcome for an event of this size and complexity.
Other KEY challenges

Traffic
Teams were required to arrive at their match venues no later than 1.5 hours before kick-off. Knowing this, Citywest Hotel put a traffic management plan in place with local Gardai and other stakeholders. This ensured that team coaches could leave the hotel grounds without any delays.

State Exams
Given their age, some players had to sit their state examinations during the Championship. Special rooms were set aside in the hotel where they could undertake the exams in properly supervised conditions.

Hotel Branding
As the base for all 16 teams, Citywest Hotel worked with the UEFA brand guardians to ensure the correct branding for the 2019 Under-17 Championship was always visible in appropriate areas throughout the hotel.

This extended to a fleet of 105 UEFA-branded vehicles which were parked in a dedicated holding area. Together, these vehicles were a very striking visual statement and clearly announced the hotel’s association with the Championship.

Laundry
Not surprisingly, managing each team’s laundry was a huge challenge. This was handled by Sunny Drycleaning & Laundry who collected and returned each team’s kit and other laundry each day.

Over the entire tournament, more than five tonnes of laundry was cleaned and returned to the hotel. Each team dropped off their laundry in a dedicated kit room by 7pm. This was collected, cleaned and returned by 9am the next morning.

Despite the huge volume of cleaning, the entire process ran very smoothly. According to laundry owner Graham Harding, this was due to careful planning and long-term notice. Initial meetings took place in January 2019 and a laundry plan was in place by February, four months before the first match took place.

Disney on Ice
At the same time as hosting the 2019 UEFA Under-17 Championship, Citywest Hotel was also the venue for the spectacular Disney on Ice which ran from 10-12 May. With over 10,000 people attending three successive shows on 11 May alone, a major traffic management plan was required. Thanks to the commitment of everyone involved, this ran smoothly and to schedule.
WHAT MADE THE 2019 CHAMPIONSHIP SO SPECIAL?

Citywest Hotel consistently hosts high-profile events and gatherings. However, the 2019 UEFA Under-17 Championship is now considered to be a landmark event in the hotel’s history for a number of important reasons:

- **Tight timings**
  With the draw taking place late on 4 April, room allocations had to be decided within a couple of hours so that team representatives could review them the next morning.

- **New financial model**
  Citywest Hotel had to adopt a new per-person pricing model rather than its standard per-room price structure. A costing had to identified that would work for UEFA, the FAI and the hotel.

- **Room reconfigurations**
  Converting bedrooms into medical rooms, planning rooms and other spaces involved a massive amount of planning, co-ordination and physical labour.

- **Cost control**
  Experience gained by hosting the four Regions Cup teams in November 2018 highlighted the need to keep everyone constantly aware of ongoing costs.

- **Real time changes**
  Constant changes in team requirements - plus the speed with which teams departed after they were knocked out - demanded agility from hotel staff and management.

- **Existing guests and members**
  It was essential that the needs of other guests and members of Citywest Hotel’s Leisure Club and Golf Club were not treated as being of secondary importance.
SECRETS OF SUCCESS

The 2019 Championship turned out to be one of the most successful in the history of the tournament. Looking back, a number of key factors contributed towards the positive outcome:

• Planning and preparation

Sean Reid, Commercial Director of Citywest Hotel has said that “Planning, planning, planning” helped to ensure that the event ran smoothly. Hosting four teams during the friendly preparation games in November 2018 highlighted potential problems, especially the need for rigorous cost-control and a strict approval process for all team expenditure.

• Commitment and flexibility

It’s impossible to foresee every issue. In dealing with the unexpected, the commitment and ‘can-do’ attitude of the entire Citywest Hotel team ensured that nothing festered or snowballed into a bigger problem. When extra pairs of hands were needed – for example, when rooms had to be cleared at short notice – staff were willing to go beyond their usual responsibilities.

• Communications

Daily morning meetings that covered the event, budgets and internal hotel issues ensured that issues were kept under constant review. Consequently, there were no surprises at the end of the event.

• One location

UEFA agreed that housing all 16 teams in one establishment with high-quality gym facilities was a very efficient solution. Having a single point of contact with the hotel meant it was easier to resolve problems. The cost duplication that would have occurred if multiple hotels were used was also avoided.

Transportation logistics were also easier to manage. Instead of having to coordinate teams travelling to venues from different starting points, each team departed and arrived at the same time.
THE UEFA VIEW
Looking back on the 2019 Championship and Citywest Hotel, UEFA Project Leader Christophe von Wattenwyl says “It was really good to have understanding counterparts”. According to him, the key elements that contributed to the success of the event were the “ongoing communications”, the “friendliness of the staff”, “a very understanding chef” and “access to top management”.

Overall, Christophe believed that Citywest Hotel offered “a great opportunity to put everyone under one roof” and reported that the feedback from all the 2019 teams was “very positive compared to other tournaments”.

Reflecting the feelings of Citywest Hotel staff, Christophe von Wattenwyl summed up the 2019 Championship by saying “We have the best memories of it”.

SUMMARY
The 2019 Championship became a labour of love for the staff and management of Citywest Hotel.

Teams that arrived as guests departed as friends and many staff members made a point of attending matches outside their normal working hours.

Being the first hotel to host the entire Championship has underlined Citywest Hotel’s status as Ireland’s premier location as a base for large-scale events. Its proximity to motorways and greater room capacity than any other establishment in Ireland, made it a natural home for teams competing in the 2019 UEFA Under-17 Championship.

The event marked a new chapter in the hotel’s history. Drawing on the experience gained in 2019, Citywest Hotel is now looking forward to welcoming many more of the world’s best teams and sportspeople in the years to come.