THE TRAVEL BEHIND THE MATCH: MOVING FOOTBALL TEAMS ACROSS EUROPE

News / Airlines, Business aviation

For professional football teams, travel planning is closely linked to match preparation. Training schedules, recovery time, equipment requirements and last-minute fixture changes can all influence when and how a team needs to travel. This is particularly relevant for clubs in Greece and Cyprus competing in European and international tournaments. Commercial flight schedules may not always align with match times, while connecting flights and long airport waits can add unnecessary pressure to an already demanding programme.

Chapman Freeborn supports clubs and other sports organisations in Greece and Cyprus with tailored aircraft charter solutions. As part of its wider international network, the company coordinates flights around the operational requirements of each team, including scheduling, aircraft selection, baggage, airport handling and onboard arrangements.

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Anestis Konstantinidis, Passenger Charter Broker – DACH, Cyprus and Greece at Chapman Freeborn commented: “Football travel is highly time-sensitive. A team may need to depart after training, arrive at a specific time before a match or return soon after the final whistle. The travel schedule therefore needs to be built around the team’s sporting requirements. The flight itself is only the most visible part of the operation. A significant amount of coordination takes place behind the scenes between the team, airline, airports and handling providers. Each club also has its own routines and preferences, which need to be understood in advance.”

A dedicated charter flight can give clubs greater control over departure and arrival times. It can also allow players, coaching staff, medical personnel and club representatives to travel together rather than being divided across different flights or connections. For teams competing away from home, this can help protect valuable training and recovery time while reducing uncertainty around the journey.

Arranging a team flight involves more than selecting a suitable aircraft. The number of passengers, luggage volume, training and medical equipment, airport operating hours, catering requirements and ground handling all need to be considered during the planning process.

Football delegations often travel with considerably more luggage than a typical passenger group. Alongside personal baggage, they may carry training equipment, medical supplies, physiotherapy materials and other specialist items. These requirements can influence both aircraft selection and airport handling arrangements. Catering may also need to reflect the team’s nutritional plans, dietary requirements and preferred mealtimes.

Football schedules are not always predictable. Kick-off times may be confirmed late, fixtures can be rescheduled and return plans may need to change at short notice. In these situations, direct communication between the club, airline, airport and handling teams becomes essential.

“One of the main challenges is that plans can change very quickly,” Konstantinidis explains. “The priority is to keep all parties informed and adjust the arrangements without creating unnecessary disruption for the team.”This flexibility is one of the reasons clubs may consider charter travel when scheduled airline options do not meet their operational needs.

Last year, Chapman Freeborn arranged an Airbus A320 charter for 143 Pafos FC team members travelling from Pafos to Athens for a UEFA Champions League fixture. The operation included coordinating the delegation, luggage and airport arrangements while ensuring that the flight schedule supported the team’s preparation.The onboard experience also featured several personalised details. The Pafos FC logo was displayed on the aircraft, while the club’s anthem was played during boarding.

“These small details helped create an atmosphere that felt familiar to the team,” says Konstantinidis, who was present in Pafos to support the operation through to departure. “The main priority was an efficient and reliable journey, but the onboard experience was also tailored to the club.”

Charter arrangements can support more than first-team travel. Depending on the requirements of each journey, flights may also be organised for national and youth teams, supporters, sponsors, club representatives and other groups connected with sporting events. Konstantinidis has also met representatives of the Cyprus Football Association in Nicosia to discuss football travel requirements and potential areas of future cooperation. While specialist sports charter services are well established in many European markets, Konstantinidis believes there is still an opportunity to

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build greater awareness of the options available to clubs and federations in Greece and Cyprus.

“Charter travel is not necessary for every journey, but it can provide an effective alternative when commercial schedules, group size or operational requirements make standard travel difficult,” he says.For football teams, the main value is not simply travelling on a dedicated aircraft. It is the ability to reduce uncertainty, keep the delegation together and organise the journey around the needs of the team.

28 JULY 2026

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