

19 October

The New York Times on Shakhtar Donetsk's journey from Ukraine to its Champions League "home" in London



Last week, [FC Shakhtar](#) Donetsk beat AEK Athens 3-1 at Stamford Bridge in London in the UEFA Champions League. The Athletic, the sports section of The New York Times, took a [special look](#) at the travel plans and emotional challenges that Ukrainian sports teams face during the war. The club's journey to London took 10 hours and needed special permission for its Ukrainian players to leave the country. Players and staff spoke about representing Ukraine while their families live under russian attacks.

How does Shakhtar Donetsk travel to London for Champions League matches?

Shakhtar travels to London by bus and plane, a journey of around 10 hours. For the AEK Athens match, 12 vehicles left Ukraine four days before the match, carrying more than 100 players and staff. They crossed the border into Poland by road and flew to London. Shakhtar nutritionist Artem Shcherbak said: "At most clubs, you organise nutrition around training sessions and matches. At Shakhtar, we also have to organise it around long bus journeys, airports, border crossings and circumstances that can change unexpectedly."

What does the war mean for Shakhtar's Ukrainian players?

Ukrainian players need special permission to leave Ukraine during the war. Under military rules, men aged 18 to 60 cannot leave the country, so the club needs a special letter from the Ministry of Sport and must bring everyone back. Ukrainian midfielder Yehor Nazaryna said: "People are suffering every day in Ukraine. Some people will finish work and will put on this game and it is a chance to give them positive emotions. For two hours, we can help them turn away from reality."

Why does Shakhtar Donetsk have such a diverse team?

Shakhtar has a strong tradition of bringing young Brazilian talent to Europe. There are 12 Brazilians in the current squad, part of a recruitment strategy that has lasted more than 20 years. Many have later been sold to clubs in Europe's top leagues, including Fernandinho and Fred. Against AEK Athens, Brazilian Vinicius Tobias scored Shakhtar's second goal.

How did Ukrainians support the team in London?

Shakhtar received strong support in London. A crowd of 29,144 attended the match, and Shakhtar fans filled three of the four stands. Around 20 Ukrainian soldiers recovering in England from war injuries were guests of the club, and Ukrainian children living in England met the players at a training session. After being told that Shakhtar had become the first Ukrainian club to win in England, head coach Arda

Turan said: "I am really happy we brought smiles to the faces of children who might be under the attacks of bombs and drones. I believe this is worth all the success in the world and what makes me happy the most." This season, Shakhtar's shirts carry the message "Invest in Ukraine", our call to international business to invest in Ukraine.