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Workers take care of the creation of tartans at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.



A worker takes care of the creation of a tartan at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland. At a tartan workshop in northeast Scotland, machines slowly unwind miles of the familiar criss-cross patterns of fabric in green, red, black, blue and white. — AFP photos



A worker takes care of the creation of the 'Ukraine Forever Tartan' at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.

Ukrainian tartan proves a hit in Scotland

At a tartan workshop in northeast Scotland, machines slowly unwind miles of the familiar criss-cross patterns of fabric in green, red, black, blue and white. But one chequered design at the Macnaughton Holdings' giant factory in Keith stands out for its unconventional colors: yellow and royal blue. For a few weeks now, the Great Scot company, a client of the firm, has been weaving its "Ukraine Forever Tartan", to raise funds for victims of the war.

"We saw what was happening on the news and like so many people we were appalled," said Patrick Lewtas, Great Scot's head of operations. "We thought,

what can we do? We could do something to raise some money and give to charities. Let's design a tartan," he told AFP. "We've had an amazing response from this from all over the world." The tartan design refers to the pattern of interlocking stripes of two or more colors running horizontally and vertically through the cloth.

It is Scotland's national fabric and different colors, particularly on kilts, have long been identified with Scottish regions and Highland clans. Once banned in the 18th century, the design has since been popularized both as a political and a fashion statement, in Scotland and around the world. When the Ukrainian tartan was first unveiled on Great Scot's Facebook

page, it was shared 10,000 times, got nearly 140,000 likes and more than 2,700 comments. Ukraine's foreign ministry also praised the initiative on its Twitter account.

Proud history

More than two miles of the fabric have already been sold, with strong demand from the United States, as well as Ukrainian expatriates. The design is now included on the Scottish Register of Tartans, and each sale sees a donation to the UK Disasters Emergency Committee's Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. "Ultimately we'd like to raise more than £40,000 or £50,000 (\$50,000-

\$63,000, 48,000-59,000 euros)," said Great Scot founder Margo Page, wearing a belted red tartan jacket. "We're not there yet but people keep asking us to weave." To those who accuse her of profiting from the war to boost sales, Page says she has chosen independent, family-run factories to produce the tartan.

"We could profit from many, many things. The whole basis of Great Scot is all about putting cloth to work in UK family-owned artisanal mills," she said. "It's about keeping those traditions going." She added: "We're not the most commercially viable by choosing those traditional mills. Our balance sheet proves we didn't profit from this tartan." Creating a

Ukrainian tartan has not been without financial risk: money has had to be advanced for yarns, dyes and production.

Now Page says her dream is to "put a kilt on (Volodymyr) Zelensky", Ukraine's president. Euan Dalgliesh, assistant manager in the Keith factory, said: "We're proud of weaving our national fabric. "If it helps other people it's great. We're always surprised by the demand for tartan. Generation after generation, we've been weaving tartan. "But you think you're always at the peak but demand continues and continues. "We're proud of our history and Ukrainians are proud of their history." — AFP



A worker wears special glasses as she sews a tartan at the Great Scot textile company in Keith, in the North East of Scotland.



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'Brain training': New frontier for eSports

The days of playing your favourite game for hours at a time to stay competitive in eSports are gone, with gamers now focusing on brain development, if one leading team is to be believed. At the Team Liquid training centre in the Dutch city of Utrecht, coach David Tillberg-Persson, alias "Fuzzface", frowns and scratches his beard, focused, eyes glued to a screen.

Using the keyboard, the 28-year-old former Swedish player must recognise shapes and "catch" red dots, anticipating, identifying and reacting with increasing speed. Tillberg-Persson is testing a new training program before it is made available to the Team Liquid players themselves. Team Liquid is one of the biggest in the professional eSports leagues and they are keen to keep their edge, with the focus on brain training adding to the use of coaches.

The image of the overweight teenager locked in his room is a distant memory in a sector that has rapidly professionalised, with prize money worth millions of dollars,

and players leading disciplined lifestyles. With new generations of gamers adding to the pool of talent, competition is fierce and teams are now seeking to optimise the cognitive aspect, which is crucial in a field where every millisecond counts.

'Revolutionary'

Described as "revolutionary" by Team Liquid, the new training program, dubbed The Pro Lab, has also been implemented in California where the team is based. "We believe The Pro Lab will make waves in the eSports industry and beyond," Dutchman Victor Goossens, founder and co-CEO of Team Liquid, said in a statement.

"The Pro Lab is a first-of-its-kind training space backed by eSports science, fundamentally changing not only the way these athletes train but how they grow and evolve along with the industry," said Team Liquid. The Team Liquid players, young people living all over the world, will be subjected to cognitive tests involving relatively simple games, the results of which will then be analysed to target both shortcomings and qualities. There are four main types: attention, memory, control and anticipation.

"We are trying to use technology and data to make our practice more efficient and more focused than what we are used to, sitting behind a PC for eight hours," explains Brittany Lattanzio, senior athletics manager at Team Liquid. "At the very, very top level it's a game of inches. The

smallest detail can make your team perform so much better than other teams", the 32-year-old Canadian tells AFP. The goal is to determine training activities for each player to improve concentration, reaction speed or memory.

'Future of eSports'

"All Team Liquid athletes are going to play the games and based on that, we're going to get a lot of data from which we create profiles," says Rafick de Mol, 28, an analyst at BrainsFirst, the Dutch company responsible for the development of Pro Lab. "It's a fairly recent development and we're at the forefront of that-that can add so much value because it provides information that other tests or conversations don't provide," observes De Mol. "It's part of the future of esports," he said.

"Fuzzface", the coach of a team that plays PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), a multiplayer combat and survival video game, is eagerly awaiting the first results. "Historically, training has been very focused on just game performance" but the new tests will give them much more data to work with, says the coach, who is already a veteran in a "very young" industry. Lattanzio said it made sense to use technology in a such a tech-based field. "There are so many more tools that you can use on a computer than you can with like running around on a football field," she said. — AFP

U2's Bono puts on 'freedom' show in Kyiv metro

Irish rock star Bono praised Ukraine's fight for "freedom" during a performance in a metro station in downtown Kyiv Sunday, where the U2 frontman also issued his own prayer "for peace". From the platform of a Kyiv metro station, the 61-year-old rock icon belted out U2 classics "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "Desire" and "With or without you". "The people in Ukraine are not just fighting for your own freedom, you are fighting for all of us who love freedom," said Bono during a break.

The singer also referenced the past conflicts in the band's native Ireland and

the troubles it had with a more powerful neighbor. "We pray that you will enjoy some of that peace soon," said Bono. The surprise appearance by Bono—a long time humanitarian who frequently lends his voice to a variety of causes including the fight against poverty and AIDS—came as air raid sirens echoed in the Ukrainian capital and fighting raged in the country's east.

At one point, Bono invited a Ukrainian soldier to sing along who called on the world's support for the embattled country as they covered "Stand by me". Bono performed alongside U2's guitarist 'The Edge' to a small crowd of fans including fatigued members of Ukraine's armed forces. "It's some good emotions, that's all," said a member of the Ukrainian territorial forces in the audience. "It's a strange feeling, like being a child going to first grade," said 36-year-old university lecturer, Olesia Bezsmertna, ahead of the show. — AFP



Bono (Paul David Hewson), an Irish singer-songwriter, activist, and the lead vocalist of the rock band U2 (left), and Antytilla, a Ukrainian musical band leader and now the serviceman in the Ukrainian Army Taras Topolia, perform at subway station which is bomb shelter, in the center of Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on May 8, 2022. — AFP