



YOU HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO: Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy (R) consoles dejected teammate Robin van Persie after Netherland's loss against Portugal at the Franken-Stadion in Nuremberg on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Dutch look beyond



INTERNET, undated

It will take years for the Dutch to repair their once-proud reputation for stylish, attacking soccer. The team fielded by Coach Marco van Basten turned to violence when its skills fell woefully short. If Portugal was the pickpocket, then the Netherlands was the thief.

A quote from Grahame L. Jones, a sportswriter for the Los Angeles Times.

We are used to listening to the opinions of Johan Cruyff, Franz Beckenbauer or Alan Hansen so the critique of a back from a country where they play 'soccer' instead of plain old would therefore patronisingly be usually laughed away.

However, I have to agree with Grahame L. Jones. Shame on us, shame on the orange shirts, although the team played in white against Portugal.

I have a vision of thousands of readers of Jones' regular columns

Van der Sar undecided

INTERNET, undated

Goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar will take his time before deciding whether to retire from international football following Holland's exit from the World Cup.

The Dutch were beaten 1-0 by Portugal in a bad-tempered second-round game on Sunday, and the United keeper is unsure if he wants to end his Oranje career on such a note.

"This is not the right moment [to decide]," the 35-year-old said. "I still have a really bitter feeling about our elimination."

"It's better to take some time first. I will sleep on it for a couple of nights and then discuss it with the people for whom such a decision also has consequences."

Van der Sar won a national record 113th cap against Portugal, but admitted the defeat had soured the occasion.

"Because of this defeat it doesn't feel at all like a milestone," he added.

"I must get through the misery first to be able to fully appreciate the record."

Coach Marco van Basten is hoping to be able to pick Van der Sar in future Holland squads, and said: "I have already spoken to him, but he wants some thinking time. I can only hope that he stays with us."

"Edwin is not only in the best of shape; he has also proven himself to be a perfect team captain. He is an absolute asset to the team."

in California, or all those other football fans in the United States and around the globe, watching their televisions in bewilderment.

They have followed World Cups through the years and taken the Dutch team as their first or second favorites, dependent on whether their own country would compete.

Johan Cruyff, Wim van Hanegem, Johan Neeskens, Ruud Gullit, Marco van Basten, Dennis Bergkamp and maybe Ruud van Nistelrooy as a United player conquered the hearts of purists.

Somewhere in a little house in Outer Mongolia or the middle of the Australian outback an Oranje fan may have invited friends and family at an ungodly hour with hefty pay TV costs to show them the 'Total Football' that he has been so enthusiastic about over all these years.

The match against Portugal was supposed to be the connoisseurs' pick and a feast on the eyes.

It was eight years since the Dutch team featured live on most foreign screens in breathtaking semi-final against Brazil, when they nearly knocked the favorites out of the tournament. Since then global fans might have seen only a couple of goals as the Dutch never got the World Cup in 2002.

It all started so brightly in

Nuremberg as Mark van Bommel's shot just went wide in the first minute. From there on in all went downhill.

The next minute the same van Bommel hacked down Cristiano Ronaldo and got booked. Then Khalid Boulahrouz was the next to assault the unfortunate Portuguese winger and was lucky to get away with a yellow card.

Over the next period it started to dawn that this Van Nistelrooy-less team was incapable of keeping possession, especially in midfield, where Phillip Cocu was never able to raise his game after three colorless performances during the group stage.

Wesley Sneijder, who had not played much in the second half of the season at Ajax due to injuries, did not fare any better.

There is always the myth in the Dutch camp that a recently recuperated player can improve his form during the tournament as Marco van Basten did himself during Euro 88. He was fresh, fit and ambitious, not taunted by any unfortunate end of a club season. Eager to prove himself.

But that was Van Basten, the super talent. Since then several players have come back from injury without making an impact at all and Wesley Sneijder was the latest. As third midfielder Mark van Bommel was mostly preoccupied with showing the

best of the talent on offer, then did the best they could in Germany. At the moment only keeper Edwin van der Sar is truly world class.

All the others were, will be, might be or should be, but just were not of that highest level in the month of June 2006. Just an average second round competitor in a tournament, who fought for dear life to stay in. And it was not a pretty sight.

The bright side though is, that Van Basten will stay for another two years and that he set his sight on Euro 2008 from the moment he started. He ditched the old guard and is building a new team. Surviving the 'Group of Death' at this World Cup was a job well done, every other advancement in the tournament would be a bonus.

Van der Sar and Cocu probably won't be there, but the greater part of the team is still young while the Dutch Under 21 were recently crowned European Champions. They did not display much total football either, but at least they won some silverware.

Stijn Schaars and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar in particular would not look out of place in the Oranje shirt. So for all those fans abroad who have been let down these weeks I should confess: yes, we are ashamed now, but the Dutch team will be back. And hopefully without a vengeance.

Cole-Ronaldo battle key: Rio

INTERNET, undated

England defender Rio Ferdinand believes Ashley Cole and Cristiano Ronaldo's battle on the wing will be one of the key elements in Saturday's World Cup quarterfinal against Portugal.

The pair was involved in a thrilling encounter when the two sides met at the quarterfinals of Euro 2004 and will meet again providing Ronaldo recovers from a thigh injury sustained against Holland on Sunday.

"Their battle against each other was one of the highlights of Euro 2004 and I expect similar quality," said Ferdinand.

"Cristiano has the ability to be one of the best players in the world. He will be a danger if he plays against us."

On England's under-par performances to date, Ferdinand added: "I don't care if people say we're not playing well."

"We're improving slowly and steadily. If you look at Argentina against Mexico they didn't perform as they did in the last few games."

"There are ups and downs in a tournament. We're at a stage now where we're improving with every game."

Inter chasing Riquelme

AFP, Madrid

Italian Serie A club Inter Milan are prepared to pay up to 18 million euros (22.6 million dollars) for Villarreal midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme, Spanish sports daily Marca reported Monday.

But the Spanish Champions' League semi-finalists stressed they were not interested in parting with the Argentine international, considered pivotal to coach Manuel Pellegrini's plans next season.

The Catalan club are more interested in strengthening their playing staff.

They recently signed Turkish striker Nihat Kahveci from Real Sociedad for five years and captured French midfielder Robert Pires from Arsenal on a two-year deal.

Klinsmann understands Kahn frustration



AFP, Berlin

Germany's back-up goalkeeper Oliver Kahn has every right to be frustrated by his substitute role at the World Cup, German manager Jurgen Klinsmann said on Monday.

The 37-year-old Kahn will be on the substitutes bench again for Friday's quarterfinal clash with Argentina and said he was still perplexed at playing second fiddle to Jens Lehmann.

"I have told him (Klinsmann)

clearly that I will never comprehend why I am no longer number one," said Kahn, who was number one choice when Germany made the 2002 final losing 2-0 to Brazil.

"I would have expected a full explanation. But as there has not been one yet, there probably never will be."

Kahn was Germany's first choice goalkeeper for eight years before Klinsmann arrived in August 2004 and stripped him of the captain's armband.

Kahn, capped 85 times for his country, was then pitted against Arsenal custodian Lehmann in a battle for the number one jersey - and lost.

"I can understand Oliver Kahn.

He still feels he is the number one and should play at this World Cup," Klinsmann said at Monday's press conference.

"I have no problem with that. It is difficult for him to accept his current role so I understand his comments."

So far Kahn has cut a grumpy figure on the substitutes bench for Germany's four World Cup matches, but Klinsmann insists he is still important for the team.

"He is playing an important role in our team as are all the other players on the fringes," said Klinsmann.

"The further we go in the competition, the more Kahn contributes to our success."

Berne, Santiago... Nuremberg



AFP, Berlin

A hail of cards - nine yellows and two reds for Portugal and seven and two respectively for The Netherlands showed the violent side of the World Cup on Sunday in the dirtiest match of the tournament to date.

With a place in the quarterfinals at stake, Russian referee Valentin Ivanov lost control along with the players from both sides as the encounter turned sour following what proved to be the only goal of the game from Portugal's Maniche, which booked his side a meeting with England.

But instead of celebrating his 11th straight win in the World Cup, Portugal's coach and Brazil's 2002 winning handler Luis Felipe Scolari was furiously hopping up and down the touchline in the realisation that playmaker Deco and Costinha will both be suspended after getting their marching orders.

"That will give England a big advantage," forecast former German coach-turned-commentator Rudi Voller, summarising for RTL televi-

sion.

A second-minute tackle by Dutchman Mark van Bommel on flying winger Cristiano Ronaldo set the tone and from then on it was mayhem as the tackles flew in thick and hard.

Ivanov also reached for red for Giovanni van Bronckhorst and Khalid Boulahrouz for the Dutch following two bookable offences each as the result paled into insignificance, at least for the neutral.

In the 48 first-round matches there were 18 red cards - one more than for the whole of the 2002 edition, with five yellows per match on average, one more than four years ago.

The worst incidence of on-pitch violence so far remains the occasion when Italy midfielder Daniele De Rossi elbowed US striker Brian McBride in the face to earn a four-match ban.

That encounter saw three red cards as the Americans had Pablo Mastroeni and Eddie Pope dismissed.

But the Portuguese-Dutch contest harked back to the days of the 1954 'Battle of Berne', when Hungary, who then were blessed with the 'magical Magyars' of Ferenc Puskas, Jozsef Boszok and Sandor Kocsis, beat Brazil 4-2 in a

quarterfinal that saw three sendings off before feelings spilled over in the dressing rooms.

Eight years later in Chile, came the 'Battle of Santiago', where the Chileans beat Italy in a group game that saw the Azzurri have two men dismissed while Italian Humberto Maschio had his nose broken - just one of a dozen violent incidents.

The low-scoring tournament of 1990 in Italy saw another violence-related first when Argentina had Carlos Morzon and Gustavo Dezotti dismissed against victors Germany for the first red cards in a World Cup final.

Regarding Sunday's card carnage, Scolari admitted "there were excesses on both sides - but the sending off of Deco was provocation."

Scolari added that Luis Figo, who could have taken an early bath for appearing to butt Mark van Bommel, "is not Jesus Christ" - although nor is a man of the Inter Milan star's experience a World Cup holy innocent.

Scorer Maniche pinned the blame on referee Ivanov for Sunday's card carnage.

"I don't think that it was such a violent match to merit so many sendings off," said the Portuguese.

It was an opinion likely not shared by many.

Lampard vows to get touch back



AFP, Baden-Baden

Frank Lampard's goal-scoring touch has deserted him at the World Cup, but he has vowed to rediscover it in the quarterfinals against Portugal.

The Chelsea attacking midfielder scored 23 times for club and country last season but has squandered countless chances in England's first four games, missing the sort of opportunities he normally buries.

The barren run continued against Ecuador on Sunday, but he is convinced he will come good.

"The goals are just not going in for me, chances which I would normally eat up," said Lampard.

"Unfortunately it's the World Cup and I've now gone four games without a goal although they're going in during training."

"That's not unusual for a midfielder player but with the standards I have set I expect to score."

Getting goals is normally a big part of his game and with Michael Owen out injured and Sven-Goran

Eriksson relying on a 4-1-4-1 formation, the team is banking on him coming good.

Eriksson though said he was not worried by Lampard's failure to score so far.

"No, I'm not concerned. He creates a lot of chances and hopefully from the quarter-finals onwards he will put one of them in the net," he said.

Lampard said he would be more worried if England was not winning games, but given they are in the last eight his personal form was not a major concern.

"The big consolation is that we are winning games and alongside that my personal tally doesn't matter although there's always the feeling I may get a couple further down the line," said the 28-year-old.

"I am hoping I am due one. The only way to make that happens is to keep on getting in there and I won't shy away from that."

"If I shy away from that, I am taking a lot away from my game so I will keep getting in there and you make your luck and the goals will come."

Despite his lack of firepower, Lampard is considered one of the fittest men in England's squad and Eriksson is certain to play him

against Portugal.

Against Ecuador, Michael Carrick was deployed in the midfield-holding role, which allowed Lampard to rampage forward more, and the Chelsea player said he thought it worked well despite not getting on the scoresheet.

"I think the system worked and it was important to have an extra man in the middle of the field," he said.

"Nevertheless we didn't stretch them enough in the first half. In the second half it was better because we put them under more pressure."

After a day's rest at their base camp in Baden-Baden, the team were to resume training Tuesday in preparation for the Portugal match in Gelsenkirchen on Saturday.

At stake is a potential semi-final match up against defending champions Brazil.

"I think we will have to raise our game now but I think that goes for everyone," said Lampard.

"You look at Argentina. Everyone fancied them to win the thing and at one stage against Mexico they looked as though they were going to struggle to go through."

"The big teams are determined to win the World Cup, but you have to play very hard to win it."

Frustrations of a reserve



AFP, Berlin

Oliver Kahn's outburst at being second string goalkeeper for Germany reflects the frustrations of being a reserve at the World Cup finals.

While outfield players can realistically think they could come on as a substitute during a match the second choice goalkeeper has to wait for a catastrophic error by his senior to even have a hope of entering the fray.

Kahn has cut a grumpy looking figure on the bench as he has watched his replacement and bitter enemy Jens Lehmann concede just two goals in the four matches so far and evidently it has all been too much for the 38-year-old.

"I have told him (Klinsmann) clearly that I will never comprehend why I am no longer number one," said Kahn, who was number one choice when Germany made the 2002 final losing 2-0 to Brazil.

"I would have expected a full explanation. But as there has not been one yet, there probably never will be."

Some have borne the frustration at being second choice well.

Peter Shilton had to wait years to displace Ray Clemence in between the sticks for England eventually getting the nod from the late Ron Greenwood over Clemence in for the 1982 World Cup.

He then enjoyed a golden patch under Bobby Robson reaching the 1986 quarter-finals and 1990 semi-finals.

Shilton did, though, lose patience at one point with one of Robson's predecessors Don Revie, who chose Clemence for three years till he upped and left the England post for a lucrative one in the Gulf.

"That was my lowest," admitted Shilton to the Malehealth website.

"I was frustrated and aggrieved. Revie said there was nothing between me and Ray yet he never gave me a chance to show what I could do."

"Brian Clough was always a big fan of mine and he didn't get on with Revie, so maybe there was

something in that," added England's record caps holder, who played for Clough at Nottingham Forest.

Gregory Coupet has also found being declared second choice 'keeper behind the ageing Fabien Barthez far from satisfactory as the 33-year-old five-time domestic champion with Lyon had justifiable claims that he should be the number one for this World Cup. "I expect to be given an explanation, because when I was told the news I didn't really think about asking questions," said Coupet at the time he was told he was second best.

"I've got a reason to be annoyed, haven't I?"

His annoyance eventually got the better of him when at the late May training camp he packed his bags and drove off only to be persuaded to return by his club fitness trainer, who is also a member of the French backroom team.

Sometimes, though, the second string 'keeper can step up to the plate when prevailed upon as Shaka Hislop displayed at Trinidad and Tobago in the 0-0 draw with Sweden earlier in the tournament.



WHAT WENT WRONG?: German substitute goalkeeper Oliver Kahn ponders after yet another missed match at the World Cup. The picture was taken after Germany's win over Sweden in the second round match at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday. PHOTO: AFP