

Euro Championship Holland short of good results

France attempt the double

PARIS, June 9 (AFP): France have it all to prove at Euro 2000 this summer in an attempt to become the first World Cup winners to go on to immediately win this continental title.

France still have the bulk of the Aime Jacquet squad which sparked off the biggest football

MANAGER: Roger Lemerre

French coach Roger Lemerre, who considered quitting his post after their last qualifier, has the task of ensuring France's World Cup win was no fluke by going on to take the Euro 2000 crown.

Lemerre was a member of the backroom team during the victorious 1998 World Cup campaign, and was in charge of the French military squad which won the world championships in 1995 to prove he has big tournament experience.

Before that, he was a defender at Sedan, Nantes, Nancy and Lens, played six times for France, and coached Red Star.



Lens, Paris FC and Strasbourg.

That pedigree in professional football with stand him in good stead during the June 10 to July 2 finals held in Belgium and Holland this summer.

However he nearly quit the team ironically after winning their last qualifier at home to Iceland on October 9 last year which sealed their ticket to the tournament.

Lemerre spent the next day hinting very strongly that he was preparing either to stand down or embark on a major rethink of team policy.

At the post-match press conference a sombre Lemerre said his mission was accomplished and he heightened speculation that he was about to stand down when he was asked if he would be in charge for France's next match, a home friendly with Croatia.

Lemerre replied: "God only knows."

Questions about the possible axing of older players such as Laurent Blanc, Didier Deschamps and Marcel Desailly, allegedly eroding Lemerre's authority in the dressing room, eventually died down and all are expected to be key members of his side.

French federation boss Claude Simonet eventually said Lemerre would continue to the end of his contract which runs till the end of Euro 2000.

That episode is now consigned to the past and Lemerre recently spoke with confidence about France's chances.

He told the French press in March: "We have no reason to fear any other team because we are the world champions. We work together well, most of the players know what it is like to win a major championship, and we clearly have the talent to go all the way."

That does not mean we will win the title, but it gives us a great chance and lot of confidence."



party ever in France following their 3-0 victory over Brazil on July 12, 1998.

Players such as Didier Deschamps, Zinedine Zidane in midfield and the World Cup winning back four of Bixente Lizarazu, Laurent Blanc, Marcel Desailly and Lilian Thuram are, barring injury or massive loss of form, going to be key players this time.

However once again their striking options are at a premium.

There was no better illustration of that lack of firepower than the World Cup Final itself.

While Brazilian fans thought the 3-0 scoreline was humiliating it should be remembered that Stephane Guivarch squandered three golden chances and substitute Christophe Dugarry one in

probably the most one-sided final in history.

Indeed the French have not had a world class strike force since the days of Jean-Pierre Papin and Eric Cantona. Though both were prolific scorers the national team was not particularly successful with the Papin-Cantona axis up front.

Many candidates have tried and failed to make the striking position their own since then. Guivarch, Tony Varelles, Nicolas Anelka, Lilian Laslandes, David Trezeguet, Sylvain Wiltord, Laurent Robert and Dugarry have all failed to seize the opportunity under Lemerre.

Anelka's good showings for Real Madrid as they went on to claim the European Champions League title recently boosted his hopes.

Perhaps, like at the World Cup, they will manage without a major front man with other players chipping in with goals and with the odd penalty-shootout victory.

Much will hinge on their Juventus playmaker Zinedine Zidane, who scored two headed goals in the World Cup final.

Though he has had a continuing knee problem and suffered chronic fatigue in the two years since France 98, Zidane is expected to yet again be the catalyst in the middle of the pitch.

France struggled when he missed four qualifiers against Ukraine, Armenia, Russia and Andorra, last year and suddenly France looked a better side when he returned.

French legend Platini, like Zidane also a star at Juventus, once said Zidane could be the last of his generation of talented playmakers.

Keeper Fabien Barthez, perhaps with Zidane one of France's most respected players, is also going to be a major influence on their campaign in Belgium and Holland from June 10 to July 2.

Barthez has resisted major offers from some of Europe's top clubs but stayed at Monaco where he won the 1999/2000 French league title. He reportedly earns around 20 million francs a year at Monaco, making him the highest paid player in the league.

France will hope he pays back some of his rich pickings from the sport with a superb showing at Euro 2000 where they play in the tough group D against Czech Republic, Holland and Denmark.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Fabien Barthez (Manchester United/Eng), Bernard Lama (Paris SG), Ulrich Rame (Bordeaux)

DEFENDERS: Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich/Ger), Marcel Desailly (Chelsea/Eng), Vincent Candela (AS Roma/Ita), Christian Karembeu (Real Madrid/Spa), Lilian Thuram (Parma/Ita), Laurent Blanc (Inter Milan/Ita)

MIDFIELDERS: Zinedine Zidane (Juventus/Ita), Youri Djorkaeff (Kaiserslautern/Ger), Didier Deschamps (Chelsea/Eng), Patrick Vieira (Arsenal/Eng), Emmanuel Petit (Arsenal/Eng), Robert Pires (Marseille), Johan Micoud (Parma/Ita)

FORWARDS: Nicolas Anelka (Real Madrid/Spa), Thierry Henry (Arsenal/Eng), David Trezeguet (Monaco), Sylvain Wiltord (Bordeaux), Christophe Dugarry (Bordeaux)

PARIS, June 9 (AFP): Holland, many people's favourites to win the Euro 2000 title on home soil, are short of good results and confidence on the run-up to the June 10 to July 2 event.

They were arguably the most complete side in finishing fourth at the 1998 World Cup, have a host of players in top European clubs and are led by AC Milan legend Frank Rijkaard.

Rijkaard was in the squad when they won the European title in Germany in 1988 and now he is entrusted with repeating that triumph as coach.

Their friendly results since the World Cup and up to the end of 1999 hardly make great reading -- one win in 12 matches.

A 2-1 win over arch-rivals Germany on February 23 this year helped gain credibility for the side but the doubters are still out in force.

Rijkaard told the Dutch press in March: "We're on course. I know we have had a lot of criticism but it's not easy to hit top form in friendly matches. It's the results at the Euro 2000 finals itself which really count and not friendlies."

Rijkaard has basically kept with the 4-4-2 system of his predecessor Guus Hiddink and the same nucleus of players.

Patrick Kluivert is a virtual certainty up front such have been his impressive performances for Barcelona in the Spanish championship and European Champions League this season.

Dennis Bergkamp will probably be Kluivert's strike partner though his patchy form for Arsenal might make Rijkaard reconsider in favour of the injured Roy Makaay of Deportivo La Coruna. The omission of the prolific Chelsea bound Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink is destined



to raise more than a few eyebrows.

Clarence Seedorf would probably be on the right of midfield, Marc Overmars on the left and then Edgar Davids and Aron Winter in the middle. But there could also be a place for Giovanni van Bronckhorst who had an impressive season with Glasgow Rangers in Scotland.

Michael Reiziger, Jaap Stam, Frank de Boer and Arthur Numan could be the back four, going from right to left, in front of first-choice keeper Edwin Van der Sar.

Van der Sar will have backing from two English-based goalkeepers, Sander Westerveld of Liverpool and Ed De Goey of Chelsea.

Hiddink was unlucky that both Bergkamp and Overmars missed their losing World Cup semifinal in Marseille against Brazil as many people thought they would go on and win the world title for the first time.

A Euro 2000 victory would go some way to making up for that disappointment and put Dutch football firmly back on the map, reminding them of their

1970's glory days and their 1988 European championship win.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Edwin van der Sar (Juventus/Ita), Ed de Goey (Chelsea/Eng), Sander Westerveld (Liverpool/Eng)

DEFENDERS: Jaap Stam (Manchester United/Eng), Frank de Boer (Barcelona/Spa), Bert Konterman (Glasgow Rangers/Scot), Michael Reiziger (Barcelona/Spa)

MIDFIELDERS: Ronald de Boer (Barcelona/Spa), Paul Bosvelt (Feyenoord), Giovanni van Bronckhorst (Glasgow Rangers/Scot), Phillip Cocu (Barcelona/Spa), Edgar Davids (Juventus/Ita), Marc Overmars (Arsenal/Eng), Clarence Seedorf (Inter Milan/Ita), Aron Winter (Ajax), Boudewijn Zenden (Barcelona/Spa)

FORWARDS: Peter van Vossen (Feyenoord), Pierre van Hooijdonk (Vitesse Arnhem), Patrick Kluivert (Barcelona/Spa), Roy Makaay (Deportivo La Coruna/Spa), Dennis Bergkamp (Arsenal/Eng)

MANAGER: Frank Rijkaard

Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard must have known as soon as the Euro 2000 draw was made in Brussels in December his side would have a tough time getting through to the quarterfinals.

Rijkaard makes his competitive debut as Holland coach in Euro 2000, and with world champions France, 1992 European champions Denmark and 1996 European runners-up Czech Republic, who had the best qualifying results, there will be no easy match.

That pool is most people's



choice as the toughest and quite a rigorous test for former Ajax and AC Milan legend Rijkaard, who won the European championship with Holland in Germany in 1988.

Dutch football is renowned throughout the world for its technical skill allied with competitiveness but the country have only won one major international event - those 1988 championships.

Ajax won the European Cup from 1971 to 1973 and Holland were twice World Cup runners-up in 1974 and 1978 with legends such as Johan Cruyff and Johan Neeskens to stamp their authority on the decade.

Holland lost the World Cup semifinal to Brazil on penalties in 1998, though key players Dennis Bergkamp and Marc Overmars were injured, and many believed them to be the best side in the tournament.

The 37-year-old Rijkaard, entrusted with leading the country of its major championship hoodoo, remained upbeat.

He told AFP after beating Germany 2-1 in February: "We are in the perfect situation to do well at Euro 2000. I think the team is as good as the 1998 World Cup side and the time is ripe for this generation of players."

They have to go out and seize the moment. We have so many players who have been successful at some of the best clubs in the world but now they have the chance to repeat that for their country.

Rijkaard won plenty of trophies as a player, including European Cup triumphs with both Ajax and AC Milan, but he would seal his reputation in Holland's unofficial Hall of Fame should he coach his country to a Euro 2000 triumph.

NOTICE

Due to space constraint Crossword could not be accommodated today. Any inconvenience is regretted. — Sports Editor

Shearer scare for England

SPA, Belgium, June 9 (AP): England arrived at their headquarters for the Euro 2000 finals here Thursday with concern rising for the fitness of skipper Alan Shearer, reports AFP.

Just four days ahead of their opener against Portugal in Eindhoven, Shearer, who is the cornerstone of Kevin Keegan's plans, underwent a scan on a knee problem before the team flew out to its Belgian base.

Both Shearer and Keegan were expressing confidence the striker would be able to face the Portuguese, although they were not anticipating receiving the results of the "precautionary" scan until Friday.

And while Shearer may not be able to train until Saturday, the England coach - who revealed that a total of eight players have undergone scans in the past week or so - will give him until the last possible moment to prove his fitness.

Until the scan results come back without any problems, the news therefore remains a major worry for England fans so close to the start of the tournament.

Shearer apparently went into last Saturday's game against Malta with a "slight niggle" in his knee and then had to be substituted after just 51 minutes after falling "awkwardly" during the match.

Keegan insisted Wednesday that Shearer was "fine" and would train Thursday, yet he still felt the scan was necessary to get a specialist view on the problem.

Keegan has already lost Jason Wilcox, Ray Parlour, Jamie Redknapp and Andy Cole from his provisional squad, but none of that quartet are even close to having the importance of Shearer within the England squad.

TOURNEY TREATS

BRUSSELS, June 9 (AP): Suddenly, Euro 2000 is faced with a baby boom. One has arrived and another is on the way.

Belgian defender Philippe Leonard became the proud father of Julia late Thursday and just a few hours later Manchester United forward Ole Gunnar Solskjaer rushed out of Norway's training camp and left for England, where his fiancée Silje Lyngvaer was expected to give birth.

"We're going to have one glass of champagne to celebrate," said Belgian coach Robert Waseige, whose Red Devils open Euro 2000 against Sweden on Saturday.

"We don't want to celebrate too much before the game," said Waseige.

Leonard was not allowed to dwell on the fuzzy feelings of fatherhood too long. He was called back to camp at 1 pm Friday, barely 12 hours after the birth. Leonard is still being considered to start as wing defender.

Solskjaer's place on the Norway team, which opens against Spain only on Tuesday, is not in doubt.

DON'T COUNT ON GARETH

England's Gareth Southgate won't be volunteering to take penalties at Euro 2000.

The defender missed a vital spot kick in a semifinal match against Germany at Euro 96 and doesn't want to go through the same experience again.

"I think we would have to go down to about 18-all before I took one," said the 29-year-old Aston Villa player. "The possibility of penalties being needed to win this competition has been discussed. The chances are that somewhere down the line it will be required because many of the teams are so evenly matched."

Southgate, who requested a shock transfer this week, missed a deciding penalty for Aston Villa this season in the league cup match against West Ham United.

"It goes without saying that I would be well down the list. It is not something I am considering. It has gone beyond the point where I have to prove a point," he said.

WEIGHT PROBLEMS

French stars Zinedine Zidane and Laurent Blanc have a weight problem. Both lost more than four kilos (8.8 pounds) during France's five-day Euro 2000 preparation in Morocco, where the world champions drew 2-2 with Japan and crushed the hosts 5-1.

"We went to Morocco to get some preparation but personally I was happy to leave," Blanc said.

The powerful Inter Milan defender, whose normal weight is 88 kilos (193 pounds), came down with a bout of gastroenteritis on the second day of France's trip to North Africa.

Zidane showed his normal prodigious workrate under the mid-afternoon sun against Japan.

"Physically, I feel strong and ready for Euro 2000," he said. "But we had some problems in Morocco with players suffering from gastroenteritis. I lost about four kilos in the match."

TV DETENTION

Soccer hooligans detained in Amsterdam during the Euro 2000 championships starting Saturday don't have to worry about missing a single game.

Temporary detention facilities set up in an abandoned harbor just outside the Dutch capital have been equipped with huge video screens which will show all the action on the outside.

LATEST ODDS

LONDON, June 9 (Reuters): Latest Euro 2000 betting:

TO WIN OUTFIGHT
10-3 - Netherlands
9-2 - France
11-2 - Spain
6-1 - Italy
9-1 - England
12-1 - Germany
16-1 - Belgium and Czech Republic
20-1 - Sweden
22-1 - Portugal
25-1 - Norway
33-1 - Yugoslavia
40-1 - Denmark and Romania
66-1 - Turkey
150-1 - Slovenia

TO WIN GROUPS

Group A
15-8 - England
11-5 - Germany
3-1 - Portugal
4-1 - Romania

Group B
11-10 - Italy
13-5 - Belgium
3-1 - Sweden
8-1 - Turkey

Group C
8-13 - Spain
10-3 - Norway
7-2 - Yugoslavia
25-1 - Slovenia

Group D
11-10 - Netherlands
7-4 - France
9-1 - Czech Republic
10-1 - Denmark

LEADING GOALSCORER

7-1 - Patrick Kluivert (Netherlands); Raul (Spain).
10-1 - Thierry Henry (France).
12-1 - Alan Shearer (England).
14-1 - Oliver Bierhoff (Germany); Filippo Inzaghi (Italy).
16-1 - Nicolas Anelka (France); Dennis Bergkamp (Netherlands); Ulf Kirsten (Germany); Michale Owen (England); David

Trezeguet (France).
20-1 - Alessandro Del Piero (Italy).
25-1 - Jan Koller (Czech Republic); Predrag Mijatovic (Yugoslavia); Vincenzo Montella (Italy); Francesco Totti (Italy); Ismael Urzaiz (Spain).
33-1 - Kenneth Andersson (Sweden); Youri Djorkaeff (France); Tore Andre Flo (Norway).

History beckons Egyptian ref

BRUSSELS, June 9: Egyptian customs officer Gamal El-Ghandour will make history when he officiates at the Spain-Norway match in Rotterdam on June 13 becoming the first non-European to referee a Euro 2000 tie, reports AFP.

El-Ghandour's participation follows an agreement between football's governing bodies in Europe and Africa to exchange referees for their top competitions.

French referee Alain Sars took part in the African Nations Cup at the start of the year in Nigeria and Ghana, and El-Ghandour was chosen to represent Africa at the Euro 2000 finals in Belgium and the Netherlands.

El-Ghandour is one of the top referees on the African continent, having taken charge of three group matches during the 1998 World Cup finals in France.

Prior to that he was a referee at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic football tournament and at the Qatar under-20 world championships.

He has also twice been in the running in 1994 and 1996, of the tournament Egyptian club derby between arch-rivals Zamalek and Al-Ahly.

REWIND

From yesterday's issue

Belgium had astonished everyone by reaching the final and were sunk by a goal in the 88th minute to lose 2-1.

Germany's matchwinner was an unlikely hero. Clumsy-looking forward Horst Hrubesch scored both goals in that final.

1984: France's first success in a big tournament came on home soil.

Michel Platini, with nine goals, was the undisputed star of the show but he featured in a magnificent midfield alongside Jean Tigana, Alain Giresse and Luis Fernandez.

Spain's nerves proved costly. In the final, a bungle from Spanish goalkeeper Luis Arconada allowed Platini's free-kick to creep under his body and over the line.

Bruno Bellone wrapped up the 2-0 victory for the host nation with a delightful chip in stoppage time.

1988: Holland came into the tournament with Ruud Gullit being touted as the player who would win all the accolades.

In fact, Gullit was upstaged by compatriot Marco Van Basten, his teammate at AC Milan.

Van Basten destroyed England with a brilliant hat-trick and also scored against West Germany.

In the final against the Soviets, Holland were leading with a Gullit header when Van Basten produced his masterpiece.

His fearsome dipping volley from the right-hand edge of the penalty area is still considered one of the greatest goals to win a major tournament.

It was Holland's first success in a major tournament and allowed the "Oranje" to consign the Johan Cruyff era to the past.

1992: Denmark are the only losers ever to win a major football tournament.

The Danes were eliminated from the tournament in qualifying only to be recalled for the final stages when United Nations sanctions led to the expulsion of Yugoslavia.

Denmark had spent most of the time on the beach - but it did not seem to matter.

Legendary goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel staked his first claim to greatness by saving a penalty in the shootout to win the semifinal with Holland. The unlucky Dutchman was ironically Van Basten, the hero of the previous tournament.

In the final, Denmark again upset the formbook with goals from John Jensen and Kim Vilfort wrapping up a 2-0 win over Germany in Gothenburg.

1996: Germany's first major title as a re-united nation came on English soil - sweet revenge for their controversial loss in the same Wembley Stadium in the World Cup Final 30 years previously.

Their semifinal victory against England on penalties was an epic with Andreas Kopke saving Gareth Southgate's spot kick.

England had flattered to deceive with a brilliant 4-1 defeat of Holland but in truth had ridden their luck, benefiting from dubious refereeing decisions in the quarterfinal with Spain and also when Germany had what looked a good golden goal chalked off in extra-time.

The Czechs astonished everyone by reaching the final and Karel Poborsky and Patrik Berger caught the eye.

A controversial Berger penalty gave them a lead in the final but Oliver Bierhoff squared the match.

Bierhoff proved the hero again when his extra-time winner became the first golden goal to settle a major tournament.