



EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000

GROUP-A

England

Germany

Portugal

Romania

English lions ready to roar

LONDON, June 10 (AFP): England coach Kevin Keegan's confidence knows no bounds.

The former Liverpool legend and double winner of the European footballer of the year award is confident his English lions will roar in this summer's Euro 2000 finals in Holland and Belgium — despite only just sneaking in via the back door.

Their path to the finals was a rocky one. Sweden, who had already qualified as winners of Group 5, did England a massive favour by overcoming Poland 2-0 in Stockholm in their last

MANAGER: Kevin Keegan

England manager Kevin Keegan may not be everybody's cup of tea.

Many eyebrows were raised across the country when the former Liverpool legend was handed one of the toughest jobs in football. He's tactically naive, too emotional they said.

But even his fiercest critics cannot deny one thing — the England coach's enthusiasm and vitality are incredibly infectious.

And many managers, Euro 2000 Championship in Holland and Belgium this summer.

There are, however, growing concerns about his lack of tactical nous. When confronted by journalists about his approach to the beautiful game he replied: "If you're looking for a draw in the Ukraine I'm probably not your man."



From his first steps as a professional at Scunthorpe United it was obvious that Keegan had a burning desire to succeed. At 15 he would run up and down the terraces with weights on his shoulders, emulating the toughest player at the club.

After 124 games for unashamedly Third Division Scunthorpe, Keegan was thrust into the spotlight when mythical Liverpool manager Bill Shankly signed him for 35,000 pounds (56,000 dollars) in 1971.

The goals flowed and the Kop adored him as he developed a telepathic understanding with Welshman John Toshack — and England soon came calling.

Sir Alf Ramsey picked Keegan for his full international debut in November 1972 — four years later he captained his country for the first time under Don Revie.

Yet Keegan has always had an instinct for when to move on and he shocked Merseyside when he realised a wish to broaden his soccer horizons by moving abroad.

He left Liverpool for Hamburg at the height of his playing career in June 1977 because he wanted a new challenge in the highly organised and technically superior German league.

Whilst there he was twice voted European Footballer of the Year. He then resisted big-money offers from the United States in favour of a return to England in 1980 when Southampton manager Lawrie McMenemy introduced him as his new signing.

Newcastle signed him from the Saints in August 1982 in a one-year deal, sponsored by a local brewery, and such was his commitment that he stayed another year and inspired Newcastle to promotion.

On the day before his 33rd birthday, however, Keegan announced his intention to quit as a player at the end of the 1983-84 season.

On his return to England in 1992 after years in the wilderness, he embarked on a new career as coach at his beloved Newcastle.

Although Keegan did not win a major trophy during his five roller-coaster years in charge, he made Newcastle the team everyone wanted to watch — testimony to the abilities of a miner's son from Armathorpe who turned a modicum of natural talent into world class skills by sheer hard work.

He resigned as Newcastle manager in January 1997 after a boardroom dispute in which he felt he was losing control of team affairs.

He then took a nine month sabbatical before returning to football as chief operating officer at Division Two club Fulham.

Whilst there he guided the London club to promotion before leaving to manage England.

Keegan's England career as a player ended with 63 caps after a 27-minute appearance against Spain in 1982 — his only experience in the World Cup finals.

match.

The result denied the Poles a play-off place and instead handed one to England — against the 'Auld Enemy', arch-rivals Scotland.

An unconvincing 2-1 aggregate win saw England qualify and although victory was somewhat hollow because of a dismal Wembley display in the

match.

Goalkeeper David Seaman, now 36, is not the formidable force between the sticks that he once was, while Arsenal teammate Tony Adams, still a major player at the heart of the defence, has had a season plagued by injury.

Defender Sol Campbell, reportedly a big money summer

competition this season, with Chelsea and Manchester United reaching the last eight of the Champions League and Arsenal narrowly losing out to Galatasaray in the UEFA Cup final.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: David Seaman (Arsenal), Nigel Martyn



second leg, coach Kevin Keegan breathed a sigh of relief as Britain's vulturous tabloids — responsible for the demise of more than one national manager, slowly backed off.

Having been spared the ignominy of being the only major European power absent from this summer's festivities, England now have the chance to measure their progress against the best, in a competition second only to the World Cup in international importance.

They may have scraped in, but Keegan, a former England international with 63 caps and 21 goals, really believes his lions can roar again and win the tournament.

"We've a terrific chance of going out there and winning it, he said enthusiastically. There's no point going out there and saying we just want to improve.

There are seven or eight teams out there who are ranked above us at the moment but it's not always the favourite that wins the race. Sometimes someone surprises you.

It wouldn't be a major surprise to other countries if we went there and won it, but in our own country at the moment people are playing down our chances.

I tell my players they're the ones who write the headlines. If they play that's what people have to write."

But Keegan's confidence cannot hide England's frailties. Several of the players who performed so gallantly in the 1996 finals are still there, but there appears to be a shortage of international quality in key areas.

Shearer says he's fit

SPA, Belgium, June 10: England captain Alan Shearer said here Saturday he fully expected to play in Monday's Euro 2000 finals Group A opener against Portugal in Eindhoven, reports AFP.

"At the moment I feel 100 per cent and yes I expect to play. But we will just have to wait and see over the next 24 to 36 hours to see if there is any adverse reaction," he said.

Shearer had trained earlier with the England squad at their headquarters in a bid to prove his fitness.

Under light rain, the Newcastle United centre-forward took part in a full one-hour practice match, raising hopes that he had shaken off a niggling knee ligament injury that has kept him on the sidelines for six days.

But the 29-year-old, who will retire from international football after Euro 2000, spent most of the session on the fringes of the main action, rarely committing himself to tackles or sudden bursts of acceleration.

Shearer, a veteran of 60 caps and 28 goals for his country, missed a penalty but found the net twice towards the end of the team session.

Afterwards Shearer sat in the centre circle while coach Kevin Keegan put the rest of the forwards through intensive shooting practice.

Keegan said he would probably decide after Saturday's training session whether his captain would play or not, but said he would give him an extra day to prove himself if Shearer felt he was close to regaining full fitness.

Keegan said on Friday for Shearer to play against the Portuguese in what could be a crucial opener.

With Liverpool's Michael Owen certain to start against the Portuguese, either Kevin Phillips, Emile Heskey or Robbie Fowler would stand in for Shearer if he fails to make it.

"He's been a great leader here, a great personality," he said. "He's done fantastically well for us."

"Of course we've talked about his game and we've done meaningful things in training to help him and motivate him, but he's not longer the player he once was."

"I don't really care what other people say to be honest, he said recently. "If you believe the praise, you might get carried away; if you believe the criticism, you might sink."

"So if you believe none of it and believe in your own ability, that will come through. I've always done that and that's one of my strengths."

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But Newcastle coach Bobby Robson must also take some credit for inspiring Shearer to give a defiant answer to his band of critics.

"He's come just after my stint as England manager, but I've watched him over the years and he's been magnificent. You talk about England centre-forwards — with me it was Gary Lineker, and you had Keegan himself, and he was Nat Lofthouse and Tommy Lawton and people like that."

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STARWATCH

Alan Shearer (England)

LONDON, June 10 (AFP): England captain Alan Shearer will be determined to go out on a high note at Euro 2000 in Holland and Belgium before the curtain comes down on his glittering international career.

The 29-year-old Newcastle striker announced in February that he would retire from international football after this summer's tournament.

Despite netting six goals in the qualifiers and being England's ever-present throughout, Shearer's status as his country's best striker has been under threat.

He has not approached his best for England since suffering a cruciate ligament injury — despite finding form for his club.

Success for Shearer would bring a fitting end to his career. He has never lost his self-belief despite suggestions that he is no longer the player he once was.

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SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: David Seaman (Arsenal), Nigel Martyn

Trouble in German machine

PARIS, June 10 (AFP): Germany's usual self-assurance coming into a major finals is not evident in the run-up to Euro 2000 with in-fighting, loss of form and an ageing squad toil.

The players are on a reported 80,000-dollar a man win bonus but they will have to drastically improve if they are to become the first side to successfully defend the title.

Euro 96 in England saw them beat the Czech Republic in the final thanks to an Olivier Bierhoff golden goal but since then it has been a gradual decline with a quarterfinal World Cup loss to Croatia on the way and then a highly-criticized defeat at the hands of Holland on February 23 this year.

They twice lost to the United States last year to tarnish their reputation. Though they won qualifying group 3 they hardly had the rest of Europe quaking in their boots with unimpressive performances.

After a two year absence from the German national

squad, Thomas Hassler got his long awaited recall to the international stage after Ribbeck named him in his 22 man squad. Veteran midfielder Hassler has 97 caps.

Germany's squad has once more been squabbling over the Jens Jeremies suspension, and if history is to be believed this is a bad thing.

During the victorious 1996

such was the length of their injury list.

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeneß joined in the welter of criticism of national team coach Erich Ribbeck that has seen Bayern players in particular queue up to have a dig at the fortunes of the national team.

Germany line up with England, Portugal and Romania in

shop".

"We ought to have leaders who are capable of directing younger players," said Hoeneß.

Hoeneß called on the German Football Federation (DFB) president Egidius Braun to intervene in the matter to prevent Bayern midfielder Jens Jeremies from quitting the national team.

The main problem is that



MANAGER: Erich Ribbeck

Erich Ribbeck has a job on his hands in his attempt to lead Germany to the Euro 2000 title and slap down critics who have said their ageing squad have little chance of defending their continental title.

Criticism from players, media and the footballing public is unlikely to cease until after tournament.

Ribbeck took over after the resignation of Berti Vogts in September 1998 a couple of months after their World Cup quarterfinal loss to Croatia and had the job of rebuilding towards Euro 2000.

The 62-year-old Ribbeck has brought a wealth of experience to the job, having been coach at Eintracht Frankfurt, Kaiserslautern, Borussia Dortmund, Bayer Leverkusen, SV Hamburg and Bayern Munich.

From 1978 to 1984 he was assistant to German coach Jupp and Ribbeck's only trophy of note was when he led Bayer Leverkusen to the 1988 UEFA Cup title.

In the qualifiers, Germany were hardly world beaters but they did put in a six-match winning sequence after losing their first match in Turkey.

Ribbeck tried hard to find a winning playing system and line-up, trying many different tactics and frequently changing the players but without a great deal of success. Perhaps the biggest lack is a talented playmaker who can link the midfield and attack in the shape of France's Zinedine Zidane.

Many foreigners in the Bundesliga have been blamed for the lack of young talent coming through which means the blend of experience and youth is heavily leaning toward the experience side.

If one were to speculate, Ribbeck, and his assistant Uli Stielike, may prefer a formation similar to the one used by Bayern Munich who make up such a large number of the squad.

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Casts in the national team's orange colours will be put on the broken limbs of patients during the course of Euro 2000, following the success of a similar move during the 1998 World Cup in France.