



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 boundaries.

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

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

cas. 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



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 unfashionable Third Division Scunthorpe, Keegan was thrust into the spotlight when mythical Liverpool manager Bill Shankly signed him for 35,000 pounds (\$60,000 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 contentment 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 Armitage 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.

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.

target for Premiership champions Manchester United, was severely exposed by the Scottish attack when he played at right-back and there is still no credible replacement for Chelsea's Graeme Le Saux on the left, ruled out by an ankle injury.

The biggest headache for Keegan is that there is no likely successor to Paul Gascoigne as a playmaker in midfield.

Although Paul Scholes scored three goals against Poland and two against Scotland, he has not had the same impact since in an England jersey — despite scoring freely for Manchester United in the Premiership.

In attack Alan Shearer is back to his fearsome self for Newcastle and will want to leave on a high note after announcing his international retirement after the championships — but most of his recent England goals have come against minnows Luxembourg or from the penalty spot.

He remains, however, the obvious target for crosses, which may mean David Beckham staying out wide on the right, rather than trying to take on Gascoigne's mantle.

On a positive note, Liverpool's record signing Emile Heskey was strong and impressive in England's recent friendly against Argentina, while Michael Owen is beginning to show the kind of form which made him such a key player in the 1998 World Cup challenge in France.

Keegan can also take heart from the way English clubs have performed in European

(Leeds), Richard Wright (Ipswich).

DEFENDERS: Phil Neville (Manchester United), Gary Neville (Manchester United), Sol Campbell (Tottenham), Tony Adams (Arsenal), Martin Keown (Arsenal), Gareth Southgate (Aston Villa), Gareth Barry (Aston Villa).

MIDFIELDERS: David Beckham (Manchester United), Dennis Wise (Chelsea), Paul Ince (Middlesbrough), Nick Barmby (Everton), Paul Scholes (Manchester United), Steven Gerrard (Liverpool), Steve McManaman (Real Madrid/Spain).

FORWARDS: Alan Shearer (Newcastle), Michael Owen (Liverpool), Emile Heskey (Liverpool), Robbie Fowler (Liverpool), Kevin Phillips (Sunderland).

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 nagging 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 it was "touch-and-go" for Shearer to play against the Portuguese in what would 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.

English thugs coming to Eindhoven

LONDON, June 10: English football supporters are buying knives from a shop in central Eindhoven, where the national team kicks off its bid to win Euro 2000 on Monday, The Sun reported on Saturday, reports AFP.

The tabloid newspaper cited sales staff in a Dutch knife shop called De Spijker as saying English fans had bought up flick knives and hunting knives.

"We have had several English fans buying knives," said salesman Patrick Lecoq. "We knew their nationality right away because some were wearing England shirts."

Trouble in German machine

PARIS, June 10 (AFP): Germany's usual self-assurance coming into a major finals is not in evidence in the run-up to Euro 2000 with an ageing squad taking its toll.

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.

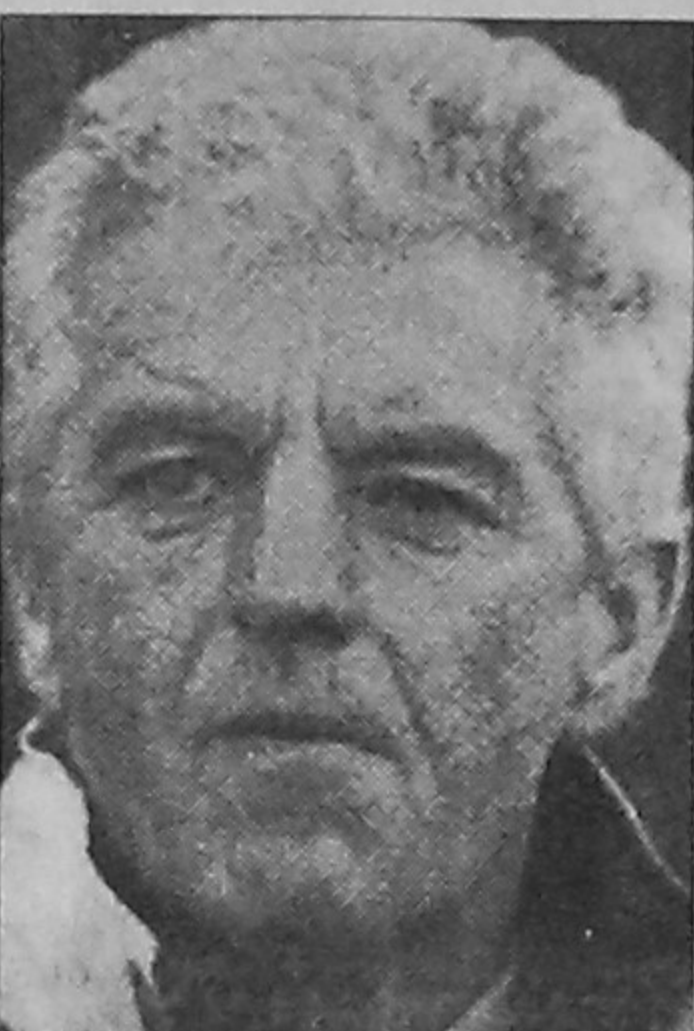
They twice lost to the United States last year to tarnish their reputation. Though they won qualifying group 3 they hardly had the rest of Europe quaking in their boots with unimpressive performances.

After a two year absence from the German national

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 Heynckes, the 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.

Though they aren't on paper a great side, no one will be writing off their chances because of the typical German spirit, their record in major tournaments and their impeccable preparation.

HK cops get ready for Euro bets

HONG KONG, June 10: Undercover police posing as football fans are planning to visit pubs and bars in Hong Kong to clamp down on illegal betting on the Euro 2000 soccer championships, a press report here said Saturday, reports AFP.

Saturday Lau Chi-kuang from the downtown Wan Chai licensing office said he suspected that some bars showing the matches live could be used as illegal bookmaking centres, the South China Morning Post reported.

Under Hong Kong law, illegal betting is a criminal offence punishable by a fine of up to 30,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$3,850 US) and nine months' jail.

Latest police figures showed betting on soccer amounted to 124 million Hong Kong dollars (\$15.9 million US) in the first quarter of this year, compared with 52 million Hong Kong dollars (\$6.6 million US) in the whole of 1998 when the World Cup was staged, the daily reported.

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 not 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



finals, they had day after day of in-fighting among their injury-hit squad and even had UEFA permission to call up additions

Euro 2000 Group A, and Hoeness, speaking at a debate in Munich, said Ribbeck was "visibly incapable of running the

the federation president must intervene to prevent Jens Jeremies from quitting the team. As a coach I could not tolerate such behaviour," said Hoeness.

It was Jeremies' description of the national team as "pitiful" that sparked the increasingly acrimonious debate.

On April 6, Ribbeck said Jeremies would not be selected for the forthcoming friendly with Switzerland but the player had been publicly supported by Bayern colleagues Oliver Kahn and Markus Babel and AC Milan striker Oliver Bierhoff, all key members of the national team.

Earlier in the season, German international libero Lothar Matthaeus told the German press Ribbeck needed help.

Matthaeus was speaking after claims that the players — and not Ribbeck — were deciding tactics.

They may be arguing and moaning with disharmony the watershed, but Germany are still a team to watch out for and never underestimate.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Oliver Kahn (Bayern Munich), Jens Lehmann (Borussia Dortmund), Hans-Jorg Butt (SV Hamburg).

DEFENDERS: Markus Babel (Bayern Munich), Thomas Linke (Bayern Munich), Lothar Matthaeus (New York New Jersey MetroStars/USA), Jens Nowotny (Bayer Leverkusen), Marko Rehmer (Herta Berlin).

MIDFIELDERS: Michael Ballack (Bayer Leverkusen), Sebastian Deisler (Hertha Berlin), Thomas Hassler (Munich 1860), Dietmar Hamann (Liverpool/Eng), Jens Jeremies (Bayern Munich), Carsten Ramelow (Bayer Leverkusen), Mehmet Scholl (Bayern Munich), Dariusz Wozniak (Hertha Berlin), Christian Ziege (Middlesbrough/Eng).

FORWARDS: Oliver Bierhoff (AC Milan/Ita), Marco Bode (Werder Bremen), Carsten Jancker (Bayern Munich), Ulf Kirsten (Bayer Leverkusen), Paulo Rink (Bayer Leverkusen).

STARWATCH

Lothar Matthaeus (Germany)

PARIS, June 10 (AFP): Germany's evergreen Lothar Matthaeus at 39 is still a class player though after his Bayern Munich going away party in March one forgets he is set to be a key figure of their Euro 2000 bid.

Matthaeus arrived in New York in early March to play for the New York/New Jersey MetroStars after having left Bayern Munich in style, helping them qualify for the quarter-finals of the Champions League with a 4-1 victory over eventual winners Real Madrid.

He may be looking for newer pastures and perhaps a good pay check towards the end of his career, but he's certainly part of the plans of German coach Erich Ribbeck.

Matthaeus, a veteran of five World Cup finals and a record 25 games, got emotional when he left the field on a standing ovation from the 60,000 fans packed into Munich's Olympic stadium.

"I'm still emotionally touched by my farewell," said the German who helped the club to six league titles, two German Cups and the 1996 UEFA Cup.

Matthaeus captained Germany to their 1990 World Cup victory in Italy as a rugged, ball-winning midfielder and was voted FIFA world player of the year the same season.

He began his career with Borussia Monchengladbach, spending five successful seasons between 1984-88, before his first spell with Bayern Munich from 84-88.

A four-year spell with Italian Serie A side Milan followed before he returned to Munich in 1992.

On February 23 this year,



Matthaeus broke the world record for international appearances with his 144th cap against Holland, beating Swedish keeper Thomas Ravelli.

Matthaeus was also in danger of not going to the United States after criticising the club after manager Charlie Stilliano and Serb coach Bora Milutinovic were both sacked — the two people who had been in contact with Matthaeus over the transfer.

But that would have meant a breach of contract and FIFA spokesman Andreas Herren told German news agency SID at the time that if a player did not respect a contract signed in good faith a suspension would be imposed.

Matthaeus tore his leg muscle in training in late May and Ribbeck will hope he will still be up to his usual high standard.

He may be a man of strong opinions and controversial at times by his comments, but his football prowess is beyond dispute.

TOURNEY TREATS

AMSTERDAM, June 10 (AFP): Dutch fans who break a limb during Euro 2000 will be looking forward to getting plastered afterwards at an Amsterdam hospital.

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.

Any supporters of the 15 other teams in Euro 2000 can rest easy, however. The hospital will still offer the traditional white variety to fans who do not want to wear their support for the "oranje" on their sleeve.

FOLLOWING THE CUSTOM

Spain's Euro 2000 squad showed their preference for local customs when they got on their bikes Friday after their morning session.

The much-fancied Spaniards preferred two wheels to the traditional team coach to travel the admittedly short distance of 600m between their team hotel and the training ground.

Spain have been boosted by the return to training of Real Madrid striker Raul, who will be fit to face Norway in their Group C opener.

Raul might have preferred to take the coach given that he has played in an astonishing 69 games since the start of the last Primera Liga season — 57 for Real Madrid and 12 for Spain, a total of 6381 minutes.

Michel Salgado is his closest challenger in the stamina

stakes with 63 matches (5435 minutes).

MANDATORY DOPE TESTS

Two players from each participating team will undergo dope tests during Euro 2000 after each match.

The players will be selected before the match by lottery

while tests can also be carried out on players at the training grounds in use during the tournaments.

For these training ground tests four players from each

squad will be selected and the team to be tested will again be selected by lottery.

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL

Slovenia President Milan Kucan Friday sent a good luck

message to his country's Euro 2000 players, who are the most unexpected qualifiers for the tournament.

The fledgling nation, which seceded from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s but escaped the worst of the ethnic fighting that plagued the region into blood-

shed, has been given a place on the world stage thanks to the exploits of Srecko Katanec's team.

"The performance of our team is going to contribute to the progressive recognition of

Slovenia in the world," predicted President Kucan.

The team's star player Zlatko Zahovic, meanwhile, believes football is the victim of a plot by the upper classes.

"There's a political lobby against football," explained Zahovic, who plays for Greek

outfit Olympiakos. "They say other sports are better. They say that football is good only for the working class."

ONLY FOR THE FRENCH

France are living a lifestyle worthy of world champions at their Chateau du Lac base at Genval near Brussels.

Zinedine Zidane and his compatriots have the most expensive accommodation of all the finalists in Holland and Belgium with rooms that normally would cost 295-309 euros (around 290-300 dollars) a night.

Next best are surprise qualifiers Slovenia (around 225 dollars a night). Cheap and cheerful is the motto for Turkey, whose rooms would normally be on the market at around the 60-80 dollar a night mark — definitely budget accommodation. (AFP)

BAD NEWS FOR GOALIES

French World Cup winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez has heaped scorn on the new, hi-tech football being used for the first time. Barthez said that the ball was too light and took off at odd trajectories. "We are going to see a lot of joke goals," he said. "This ball was designed to test us goalkeepers. It's going to pose us big problems." On the other hand Barthez said he was pleased with the new six seconds rule for goalkeepers getting rid of the ball. "It leaves you free to clear the ball and I can kick it further and with more precision."