

Europe's 'Brazil' aims

PARIS, June 10 (AFP): Portugal, known as the "Brazilians of Europe", have a chance to match reputation with results in Euro 2000 and thereby recoup the status of a whole generation of players who promised so much.

Portugal have never had the soaring success of their colonial cousins in South America who have won a record four World Cup titles and competed in every final since the tournament's conception.

Portugal's under-20 world title wins in both 1989 and 1991 however gave the impression a whole new batch of players would come through to the se-

MANAGER: Humberto Coelho

Benfica legend Humberto Coelho is the man entrusted with pulling Portugal out of the nearly-men category and into the class of world beaters in the image of their 1966 Eusebio-inspired team which came third in the World Cup.

England, Germany and Romania form a tough Euro 2000 group and Coelho would admit to suddenly find themselves champions of Europe would be a major surprise.

But with the hosting of Euro 2004 just around the corner, pressure is mounting in the country for good things to come out from the football extravaganza in Belgium and Holland.

Coelho has made it clear he wants to see more character and spirit in the side. "Team spirit is the key," he told reporters the day before their March 29 international against Denmark in Leiria, to the north of Lisbon.

"Often against a team like the Germans we think we are beaten before the start and then we lose. That sort of attitude will be unacceptable at Euro 2000."

Coelho certainly played with a lot of spirit. An outstanding centre back for Benfica lasting 14 seasons, he won eight Portuguese league championships and played 64 times for his country, and became known as the "Portuguese Beckenbauer."

His dribbling down the left flank or deft and incisive passing from just behind the front two strikers, make him the key man linking midfield and attack.

Costa's technical abilities mirror the image Portugal has abroad - talent in abundance in attacking midfield, but lack of defensive strength and thrust up front.

To say Portugal only have talented midfielders who can pass is just not true," he told reporters at Leiria the day before their match against Denmark on March 29. Costa's 28th

birthday.

"We have great players in all departments. But this criticism can only fire us up to do better when we get to Belgium and Holland.

"Our group is a tough one including England, Germany and Romania but I am convinced we will have a great tournament."

History is not on Portugal's side because in 10 competitions, they have been eliminated in the qualifying stages eight times. Admittedly he did feature in one of the best matches in the competition's history when losing 3-2 to France in the 1984 semi-final in Marseille.

However the team is still seen as a side featuring Fiorentina's Costa and Barcelona star Luis Figo, recently voted Portuguese player of the year for the fifth consecutive time, as the only real serious world class players in the best group runner-up.

Fiorentina went out of the European Champions League in the second round group phase and they are out of the hunt for the Italian title, in contrast to last season when their challenge faltered in the closing weeks.

Costa's industry matches his talent and Fiorentina's loss is Portugal's gain with their talented playmaker likely to be fresh and ready for Euro 2000.

Portuguese players for Euro 2000

will all be nearing or past 30 by the time the 2002 World Cup comes round and surely past their

best. Speaking the day before their Euro 2000 warm-up against Denmark in the north of Lisbon, said: "I agree there are many of my players competing in their last finals and I will give them a final chance to win a major trophy."

"I have no doubts that



Players such as keeper Vitor Baia, defenders Fernando Couto and Secretario, midfielders Paulo Sousa, Rui Costa, Luis Figo and striker Joao Pinto will all be nearing or past 30 by the time the 2002 World Cup comes round and surely past their

best.

Portugal were settling up to go all the

Euro 96 when a 3-0 g

STARWATCH

Rui Costa (Portugal)

PARIS, June 10 (AFP): Portugal's chances of making their mark in Euro 2000, considered vital in the country which is hosting the 2004 finals, rest to a large part on the shoulders of playmaker Rui Costa.

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see attacking opportunity before opposing defender him extremely dangerous

"His dribbling ability is excellent but I cannot stress enough he must play right behind the strikers. His effectiveness would be wasted if he played too deep."

The former Benfica star, who made his debut against Switzerland in March 1993, scored six times in the qualifiers as Portugal went on to go through automatically as the best group runner-up.

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Edo Espinosa (Vitoria Guimaraes), Joaquim Silva "Quim" (Sporting Braga)

DEFENDERS: Roberto Severo "Beto", Rui Jorge (both Sporting Lisbon), Carlos Secretario, Jorge Costa (both FC Porto), Abel Xavier (Everton/Eng), Fernando Couto (Lazio/Ita), Dimas Teixeira (Standard Liege/Bel)

MIDFIELDERS: Paulo Sousa (Parma/Ita), Rui Costa (Fiorentina/Ita), Luis Figo (Barcelona/Spa), Sergio Conceicao (Lazio/Ita), Francisco Costa "Costinha" (Monaco/Fra), Paulo Bento (Real Oviedo/Spa), Jose Vidal (Sporting Lisbon)

FORWARDS: Joao Pinto, Nuno Gomes (both Benfica), Ricardo Sá Pinto (Real Sociedad/Spa), Pedro Resende "Pauela" (Deportivo La Coruna/Spa), Nuno Rocha "Capuchinho" (FC Porto)

cocker to French club Nancy.

Undoubtedly, Jenei's impressive and somewhat long honours list weighed largely in his favour.

National team coach from September 1986 to July 1990, he led Romania to the last 16 of the 1990 World Cup in Italy, a stage of the competition that had not been reached by Romania since 1958. During that initial period he only conceded 9 defeats out of 40 matches.

Previously, Jenei made his own mark in history by becoming the first ever coach of a Romanian team to taste victory in the European Cup, with Steaua in 1986.

Thanks to Jenei the capital club filled its trophy cabinet with numerous trophies, including four league titles and three domestic cups. A permanent presence around the Bucharest stadium for close to 17 years, on several occasions Jenei attempted to repeat his successes abroad, but to no avail.

His popularity in Romania elevated him to such a level that he was named Secretary of State for Sport in 1997-1998. Today, returning as national team coach, "uncle Ion" will be hoping to get the best out of his experienced group of thirty-somethings in the forthcoming Euro 2000 finals.

The players were in the coach for an hour and a half this morning. They are training this evening and are playing against Denmark on Monday, named France as his favourites to win the tournament, reports Reuters.

"We're not the favourites, the French are," Matthaeus, nursing a muscle strain on his right thigh, told reporters on Friday.

"France won the World Cup two years ago and I think they have an even better team now," added the veteran libero, who sustained his injury in the European champions' final warm-up, a 8-2 demolition of Liechtenstein on Wednesday.

Matthaeus, eager to extend his world record to 148 caps, has trained only lightly since Germany arrived at their Dutch base of Vlaard on Thursday.

He kicked the ball for the first time, but only tentatively, in the second of Friday's two sessions in Kerkrade, on the home ground of Dutch side Roda JC.

"I don't know whether I'll be able to play on Monday," he said. "I'll undergo more tests tomorrow (Saturday) morning and after that I'll try to train properly with the team."

three league titles and one cup

during the next 24 hours and it's too early to say if he is ready or not.

Portugal's assistant coach Rui Cadador said: "We still have 48 hours to go and tomorrow night we have our final training session and after that all the selection decisions will be taken."

Portuguese journalists believed Sousa who won consecutive European Champions league finals in 1996 for Juventus and in 1997 for Borussia Dortmund would very likely play.

They added that Portugal would likely play a 4-2-3-1 system with either Sá Pinto or youngster Nuno Gomes the lone striker in front of an impressive midfield of Luis Figo, Rui Costa and Joao Pinto going from right to left.

Hard working Paulo Bento would be alongside Vidal, just behind, with a back four of Secretario, Fernando Couto, Jorge Costa and Dimas in front of keeper Vitor Baia.

He joined Chelsea FC in 1995 from Sheffield Wednesday, having earlier played in Italy with Genoa 1893 and Fogli Calcio.

Adept in defence, magnificently raiding forward, Petrescu is a tremendously versatile player who can play in defence

with Steaua Bucharest, and the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup, the FA Cup and League Cup with Chelsea.

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had had tactical training, speed

drills and an 11-aside game

during their Saturday session.

Erkussen, after playing for Brazilian club Santos last year, was a major factor in their almost capturing the national championship.

Has tough competition for the strikers' positions with Ulf Kirsten, Olivier Bierhoff and Carsten Jancker but he sees it as something positive rather than a setback.

"We have four very good strikers and that's a good problem to have although it makes it difficult for me to get in the side," Rink told reporters at the Roda Kerkrade pitch moments after Friday evening training.

"But we must accept the team has an aim and we cannot all play."

He agreed that Ulf Kirsten in theory would be the best strike partner for him because they both play at Leverkusen.

Rink's career at Leverkusen mirrors that of his international activities. Originally called up by Bert Vogts, he was shown his cast aside until his good showing at Leverkusen this year caught the eye of coach Erich Ribbeck.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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