



# EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000

GROUP-C

Norway

Spain

Slovenia

Yugoslavia



## Norway mere beginners in Europe

PARIS, June 11 (AFP): Norway may have beaten Brazil at the 1998 World Cup but Euro 2000 will be the first time the Scandinavian nation, who were mere semi-professionals in the early 80's, have qualified for the European championship finals.

Nils Johan Semb is the coach entrusted with their campaign in Belgium and Holland this summer, having taken over from Egil Olsen after France 98.

Norway qualified after winning an all-be-it weak group

### MANAGER: Nils Johan Semb

Nils Johan Semb coached efficient Norway to the Euro 2000 finals by topping group 2 with ease to reinforce their already impressive international record during the last decade.

Semb knew when he took over from Egil Olsen just after the success of France 98 it might be difficult to motivate his players but they certainly showed the determination needed.

Semb used the same tactics and nucleus of players as under Olsen to get through although they had poor results in their first two qualifiers, only gaining a point from matches against Albania and Latvia.

He then had a training session in Blackburn as so many of his squad play in England. Early in 1999, he then entered his team into a tri-nation tournament in Israel and, with a balanced blend of youth and experience, they managed to win it.

Key players such as Tore-Andre Flo, who scored the winning penalty against Brazil in the World Cup, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Kjetil Rekdal helped Norway go on and win six straight games to win their final berth.

Semb finished his playing career with Erik Tonsberg and took over the coaches job where he had three successful years. He joined the national set up and had coaching roles at vari-



two, comprising Slovenia, Greece, Latvia, Albania and Georgia.

Eight wins and a draw from 10 is still no bad record and their group opponents of Turkey, Belgium and Italy in the finals would do well not to underestimate them.

Norway were once one of Europe's poor sides.

Per Richard Lochen of Norsk Telegrambyra newspaper, who covered Norway beating England in the early 80s, remembered how current England manager Kevin Keegan went on television before that match.

Lochen remembers the then-international Keegan saying: "Sorry Norway, we have to beat you. You are a poor nation." England's defeat caused a scandal.

### STARWATCH

#### Ole Gunnar Solskjaer (Norway)



PARIS, June 11 (AFP): Norway's Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has a habit of slatching the line-light on the football pitch — and that's just what Norway coach Johan Nils Semb wants him to do at the Euro 2000 football finals.

Fame was thrust on the Manchester United striker when he came on to score the deciding, injury time goal against Bayern Munich to win the 1999 European Cup and complete the treble with the English Premiership and FA Cup already in the bag.

Solskjaer scored 18 goals for United last season and, considering he wasn't an automatic starter in United's star-studded squad, that was quite an achievement.

Semb used Solskjaer in seven of their 10 qualifiers and he scored five goals which is quite a feat as he plays out of his usual position with Tore-Andre Flo a lone striker.

Semb said at La Manga, Spain, during the Nordic football tournament in February: "He's a great player to have. He is succeeding at the highest level with his club."

"Of course I would be delighted if Solskjaer scored the winning goal in injury time at Euro 2000 but I doubt anything like that will happen again."

Opponents will underestimate this baby-faced assassin at their peril.

In February last year, Solskjaer scored four goals in the final 10 minutes and Andy Cole and Dwight Yorke both netted twice as United destroyed bottom club Nottingham Forest 8-1 in the Premiership.

ous youth teams within the Norwegian football federation.

His success with the under-23 team made him an ideal candidate to step up into the senior team role when "Drillo" Olsen, coach for nine years, called it a day.

Norway's national side has come a long way from their crew of part timers in the early 80's to reaching the World Cup second round in both 1994 and 1998.

Norway have managed to gain the maximum from the limited resources of a country of about 4.5 million people and only 270,000 registered players.

Their players are now used to playing in one of the most competitive leagues in the world and are at home in front of major crowds.

"We certainly have players of big match experience so I don't see why we shouldn't do well. Well, it's all about results so we'll have to wait and see," Semb said.

### Waseige still not happy

BRUSSELS, June 11: Belgian coach Robert Waseige said he was delighted his team had beaten Sweden 2-1 on Saturday in the opening match of Euro 2000 but felt they would have to perform better to win their next match against Italy, reports Reuters.

"I don't think I'll surprise anyone when I say the result was excellent for us. But the way we achieved it was not exactly the way I had planned it," he said.

"I'm very satisfied that we won. We didn't play very well but we held on to our slight advantage to the end of the match."

He said he was pleased with his team's work rate and teamwork.

"I think it was a nervous match. We worked hard right to the end. I don't think the Swedes had more than three chances in the match," he said.

"Everyone has been concentrating on defence in the last few months. We have proved we can do it. Everyone wants to play and to do well for everyone else... we proved that with mental quality a team can win matches."



Paul Ince (C), the veteran England midfielder, rejoicing after scoring in training at their Euro 2000 base in Spa yesterday. —AFP photo

## Underachievers' time to prove

PARIS, June 11 (AFP): With Spanish football currently enjoying a resurgence, national team coach Jose Antonio Camacho travels to Holland and Belgium knowing that victory in Euro 2000 could turn a renaissance into a golden age.

Spain have long been considered the great underachievers of European football.

Their ability to contrive defeat from the jaws of victory is legendary — notably in the 1984 Euro final when a bungle from goalkeeper Luis Arconada allowed Michel Platini to put France on the road to a 2-0 victory.

### MANAGER: Jose Antonio Camacho

Willpower, commitment, the burning desire to win: Jose Antonio Camacho has given back to the Spanish national side some of the basic ingredients they need to attempt a repeat of their European nations Cup-winning episode of 1964.

The ex-Real Madrid defender has a simple method to go with his recipe for success, which consists of formulating the best 11 individuals to shine collectively on the park.

A "tactic" which, although basic, worked wonders during the qualifiers and gave Spain a taste of what might be in store come June. Since his appointment in 1998, Camacho's track record has been impeccable.

His fidelity to the red and yellow of Spain is unquestionable, as much in his present remit as during the 81 times he was capped for his country — a national record which is second only to the now-retired legendary goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta.

As one of Real's hardest defenders Camacho never failed to keep himself in check, and, of course, his adversaries.

Born in Cieza on June 8, 1955, Camacho's highly successful playing career gave him a reputation as a battler in the Real side of the 1970s and 1980s who over a period of 15 years, won a total of 9 Spanish league titles, 5 Spanish Cups and 2 UEFA Cups.

Since taking over from the irascible Javier Clemente in September 1998, the 44-year-old Camacho has passed an important stage in a career which has taken him from Rayo Vallecano to Espanyol, Seville and

Borussia Dortmund.

The only black mark was his 20-day period at former club Real during the summer of 1998 when he walked out of the Santiago Bernabeu stadium after disagreements with the club's directors.

Currently enjoying the privilege of an elimination stage in which Spain won all their matches, Camacho hopes his favoured 11 will be dancing to the same rhythm once the tournament gets underway.



Likewise in France 98 it was an uncharacteristic error from another goalkeeper Andoni Zubizarreta that accounted for the Spanish, allowing Nigeria back into the match Spain were hitherto dominating with the African side emerging 3-2 victors and consigning Spain to what was eventually a first round exit.

But times are changing. Last year Spain won their first world title at any level with their under-21 side triumphing in the Paris final.

That was followed by this year's domination of the Champions League with Spain unprecedentedly providing both finalists Real Madrid and Valencia as well as another semifinalist Barcelona.

Real goalkeeper Iker Casillas, just turned 19, featured in both those winning teams and is he who more than anyone who represents the face of the rejuvenated Spanish football scene.

Perhaps the first sign of his tender years came at the final whistle in Paris as Real sealed their 3-0 Champions League final win over Valencia when the

### STARWATCH

#### Raul Gonzalez Blanco (Spain)



PARIS, June 11 (Internet): The golden boy and undoubted star of the Spanish team was the top scorer in the qualifying campaign, scoring ten goals in eight matches. His qualifying goals included a four-goal haul against Austria, which was followed by a hat-trick against San Marino four days later. A further goal in January's friendly victory over Poland took his tally to 19 international goals.

Just as he replaced Emilio Butragueno on his Real Madrid debut as a 17-year-old, so he looks set to overtake the former Madrid legend's 26-goal tally at the top of Spain's all-time scoring charts.

At the age of 19, he debuted for the national team against the Czech Republic in 1996 and has become a fixture in the side. He started his career as a midfielder, but is a natural finisher, as evidenced by his tally of 85 goals in his first five seasons at Real. He has played 32 games for his country.

Still only 22, he has already won Spanish league and UEFA Cup honours and scored Madrid's winning

goal in the 1998 Intercontinental Cup triumph over Vasco da Gama.

He was not selected for Euro 96 in England but was involved in Spain's disappointing 1998 World Cup campaign, scoring a fine goal in the 3-2 defeat by Nigeria.

He will probably be partnered by Ismael Urzua and will be one of the favourites to land the top goalscorer accolade in the finals.

## TOURNEY TREATS

### UNEMPLOYED FANS, WATCH OUT

Unemployed British fans who travel to the Euro 2000 soccer tournament face losing their benefit payments, Social Security Secretary Alistair Darling said on Monday.

Darling, who has promised a crackdown on welfare cheats, said unemployment benefit was available only to people actively seeking work.

Fans arrested and convicted of violence during the tournament would have their benefits stopped, he told the Independent on Sunday. But the paper quoted officials as saying even fans who avoid arrest could have their payments stopped. "We intend to stop their benefit if they are convicted at Euro 2000."

"Income Support and Job Seekers Allowance rules are clear — you are supposed to be in this country actively seeking work," Darling told the newspaper.

### GOOD LUCK SHIRT FITS ENGLAND

If the England squad are in any doubt about the huge sense of public expectation back home, then they need only enter the media centre at their lavish training ground.

A giant England shirt, measuring 60 feet by 60 feet and featuring thousands of good luck messages hangs along one of the

wall's of the converted sports complex where the players come to talk to the media.

The shirt was transported around the country in the months leading up to the tournament, allowing fans to send their own personal messages.

There is a good number of "Love You" messages for David Beckham as well as one urging England to practise penalties before the match against Germany on June 17 in Charleroi.

But one message stands out from all the rest — a note of encouragement from Prime Minister Tony Blair, an avid Newcastle United fan, who was the last person to put his pen to the flag.

### ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

Kevin Keegan's determination to create a sense of harmony in the England camp has led to a change in the traditional dining arrangements at squad headquarters.

The whole squad, together with all the coaches and back-up staff, now all share the same tables, ending decades of catering apartheid in the England camp.

Manchester United defender Phil Neville said that it was one of the first changes Keegan introduced after taking over from Glenn Hoddle, whose relationship with the players was often strained.