

Slovenia the surprise package

PARIS, June 11 (AFP): Slovenia start the Euro 2000 finals as 200-1 outsiders to win the event but their surprise qualification proved they are capable of upsetting supposedly superior opposition.

The former Yugoslav republic is still in its infancy as a nation, but the country has already stamped its mark on European football.

MANAGER: Srečko Katanec

If one man can be credited with the dramatic emergence of Slovenia as a football nation to be taken seriously it is their young coach Srečko Katanec.

The former Yugoslav and Slovenian international, the youngest and least experienced of all 16 coaches at Euro 2000, has instilled confidence and discipline in a side who had played their first ever international just six years earlier.

"We were not lucky," said Katanec after Slovenia clinched a place in the finals with a 3-2 aggregate win over outright favourites Ukraine. "We deserved to qualify because we dared to be courageous throughout the tournament."

If I taught the boys anything at all, it is that team spirit is vital and that we will only achieve good results if we are all good friends off the pitch and play with our hearts on it."

Katanec came to the post with only minimal coaching experience as manager of Slovenia's Under-21 team between 1996 and 1998 and Slovenian club side H. Gorica.

In Slovenia's opening match against Yugoslavia at the Euro 2000 Katanec will pitch his tactical wits against veteran coach Vujadin Boskov, who coached the rangy defender at Sampdoria in Italy's Serie A from 1989 to 1992.

Capped 31 times for Yugoslavia and five times for Slovenia, Katanec began his playing career with clubs in Ljubljana before spells with

After finishing a surprise second in Group 2 behind Norway and ahead of Greece, Latvia, Albania and Georgia, the Slovenes caused a major upset by beating a powerful Ukraine in the play-offs to make the finals.

Since gaining full independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, the Slovenes have only rarely created waves on the international scene.

A 1-1 draw at home to Italy in a Euro-96 qualifier — their first competitive match — and a handful of victories over equally modest opposition represented the sum total of their achievements.



Their successful campaign for Euro-2000 was all the more remarkable as their bid to make France '98 ended in disaster when they finished bottom of their group with just one point from eight games.

But the arrival of Srečko Katanec as coach transformed the country from whipping boys to winners in the space of just 15 months.

Under Katanec's inspirational management Slovenia won six and drew three of their 12 matches in 1999 as they moved up nearly 50 places to 40th in the world rankings.

After Slovenia clinched their 3-2 aggregate win in Kiev, thousands of fans braved freezing temperatures to give them a heroes' welcome as wild celebrations erupted all over the tiny mountainous republic. Until the dramatic 1-1 draw

swept through the country's two million population in the build-up to the Euro 2000 finals where they will play their former overlords Yugoslavia as well as Spain and Norway.

The Slovenes again showed their capacity to upset in April when they led world champions France by two goals early on in Paris, only to lose 2-3 to a last-minute strike.

Most of the squad are drawn from the national league and are little known outside of Slovenia, but the pivot and inspiration of the team is the highly talented, if temperamental, midfielder Zlatko Zahovic.



in Kiev — secured by a late equaliser from Mladen Rudonja — skiing and basketball dominated the sports pages of the Slovenian press.

The sport was a mere side-show but football fever has

who, ironically, has never played club football in his homeland.

Zahovic is one of a hard core of players on which Slovenia's success has been built and on which their hopes at Euro 2000 will hang. The other key players are defenders Marinko Galic, Darko Milanec, Aleksander Knavs and midfielders Dzon Novak and Ales Ceh.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Mladen Dabovic (Mura), Dejan Nenec (Lokeren/Bel), Marko Simunovic (Maribor)

DEFENDERS: Spasojc Bulajic (FC Cologne/Ger), Marinko Galic (Maribor), Aleksander Knavs (FC Tirol Innsbruck/Aut), Zeljko Milinovic (Lask Linz/Aut), Darko Milanec (Sturm Graz/Aut)

MIDFIELDERS: Milenko Acimovic (Red Star Belgrade/Yug), Ales Ceh (Sturm Graz/Aut), Saso Gajser (Gent/Bel), Rudi Istencic (Bayer Uerdingen/Ger), Amir Karic (Maribor), Miran Pavlin (Karlsruhe/Ger), Zoran Pavlovic (Dynamo Zagreb/Cro), Djoni Novak (Sedan/Fra), Zlatko Zahovic (Olympiakos/Gre), Anton Zlogar (Hit Gorica)

FORWARDS: Milan Osterc (Olimpija Ljubljana/Slo), Mladen Rudonja (Saint-Truiden/Bel), Ermin Siljak (Servette/Swi), Saso Udovic (LASK Linz/Aut)



Saso Udovic (Slovenia)

PARIS, June 11 (Internet): The well-travelled striker is the most experienced front-runner in the squad, and he played in all 12 Euro 2000 qualifying matches. However, he failed to hit the target in those games, reducing the impressive goal ratio he had established when hitting double figures in his first 20 internationals.

He made his debut in 1993 against Estonia and has been a regular ever since. He has so far played in 35 international games for his country with 15 goals. The eighth most capped Slovenian of all time, only Zlatko Zahovic has scored more goals at international level for the national side. Despite his barren spell throughout the qualifying series he remains first choice, and his height and undoubted eye for goal will pose problems for any defence. Excellent at holding the ball up, allowing Zahovic to make storming runs, Udovic is also a formidable penalty box poacher.



Dynamo Zagreb, Partizan Belgrade and Stuttgart in Germany. But his greatest triumphs as a player came towards the end of his career in the early 1990s with Sampdoria in Italy's Serie A.

A skilful and intelligent defender, he was a key player in the Genoa club's emergence as a force in Italian football and collected winners' medals in the European cup winners' cup, the league and the Italian Cup.

Yugoslavs get over Kosovo conflict

PARIS, June 11 (AFP): Yugoslavia's veteran coach Vujadin Boskov enters Euro 2000 as the elder statesman of the continent's football but it is only in the last seven months that he has been able to bask in the status of national hero.

Boskov lifted the morale of a nation in the wake of the NATO bombing campaign by qualifying for Euro 2000 despite a campaign ravaged by post-ponelements and controversy because of the Kosovo conflict.

Qualification was all the sweeter for Yugoslavia as it was achieved with a 2-2 draw in the Zagreb fiefdom of their Balkan arch-rivals Croatia — at the expense of the team that had come third in the World Cup in 1998.

The sight of Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, who had led the Croats to independence after a bloody secessionist war with the Federal Republic of Yu-

goslavia, leaving the stadium looking downcast was savoured by the people of Belgrade, who took to the streets to celebrate.

Against such a background, then, Yugoslavia's presence in Holland and Belgium is an achievement in itself.

Even on their travels Yugoslavia ran into problems with the government of the Republic of Ireland refusing them visas because of the Kosovo conflict.

Away from the nationalism that inevitably casts a shadow on the region Boskov, who only took the job in mid-campaign, is a cosmopolitan figure.

His curriculum vitae by any standards makes impressive reading. Such is the experience of Boskov that two of his rival coaches in Group C both played under the Yugoslav at club level.

Spain boss Jose Antonio Camacho was a member of the Real Madrid side under

Boskov's command lost the 1981 European Cup Final to Liverpool.

Slovenia coach Srečko Katanec, meanwhile, also played under Boskov this time in Italy for Sampdoria.

Norway make up Pool C but their coach Nils Semb never played under Boskov.

As ever Yugoslavia can call on some hugely talented players as they bid for the European title.

Veteran Lazio defender Sinisa Mihajlovic, Inter Milan's Vladimir Jugovic and Fiorentina's Predrag Mijatovic are just some of the talents that Boskov can call on.

But one player who will not be at Holland and Belgium is Dejan Savicevic — Rapid Vienna's former AC Milan legend — who admits he will not be fit to compete.

Mihajlovic and Jugovic represent the ageing generation of Yugoslav stars that have been inspirational at club level over the past decade but have seen their international aspirations foiled by politics.

Mihajlovic is a class act and is widely considered the greatest freekick taker in the world, his trusty left foot proving a potent weapon for club and country.

But the Lazio player, a Serb born in the Croatian town of

Vukovar that was the scene of the first real atrocities of the most recent phase of the centuries-old Balkan conflict, also has ruffled feathers with his dabblings in politics.

He recently courted controversy by penning a favourable obituary of Serbian warlord Zeljko Raznatovic — better known under his nom de guerre Arkan.

Of the younger generation Real Mallorca's Jovan Stankovic is one who will be hoping to make a name for himself in the summer football festival.

Up front Yugoslavia will also be able to call on the services of Savo Milesevic, who after an indifferent spell with Aston Villa, is proving a big hit with Real Zaragoza.

Another veteran is Dragan Stojkovic who now plays his club football for Japanese outfit Nagoya.

He starred way back in the 1990 World Cup for his country and was part of the generation of players that lifted the World Youth Cup before the break-up of the country.

In 1992 Yugoslavia were forced out of the European Championship because of United Nations sanctions — and then sat back and watched their replacements Denmark lift the title against all the odds.



Salgado not sure for Norway clash

TEGELEN, Netherlands, June 11: Real Madrid full-back Michel Salgado suffered an injury to his right ankle in training Saturday and is doubtful for the Spain team that will face Norway in the Group C opener in Rotterdam on June 13, reports AFP.

Spanish team doctor Genaro Borras would not rule the player out of the match with the Scandinavians, however.

MANAGER: Vujadin Boskov

Vujadin Boskov, who at 69 will be the oldest of all 16 coaches at Euro 2000, is one of the most experienced, widely travelled and respected managers in European football.

Having managed 12 clubs in a 38-year coaching career, Boskov came out of retirement to take over the national team for a second time after Milan Zivadinovic was sacked in mid-1999 for signing an unsanctioned contract with a Saudi Arabian club.

The managerial journeyman has enjoyed an equal amount of success both as a player and as a coach, playing 57 times for Yugoslavia and featuring in two World Cups: 1954 in Switzerland and Sweden (1958).

Boskov's coaching career began in 1962 with a two-year spell at FC Young Boys (Berne) in Switzerland before he returned to the Balkans to take over at FK Vojvodina, where he began his playing career in 1946.

He remained there for seven years before being appointed coach of the Yugoslav national side (1971-1973). Boskov then coached Feyenoord in Holland, followed by Zagorassa, Real Madrid, and, in 1982, Sporting Gijon in Spain.

Heading east again, in 1984 he headed to Italy to coach Ascoli, remaining one season before joining Sampdoria at the



start of what proved to be the club's best years in its 50-year history.

Under Boskov's shrewd reign the Genoa club won the league title in 1991 for the first time in their history, two Italian Cups and the European cup winners cup in 1990.

Sampdoria also reached the final of the inaugural Champions League in 1992, but were beaten by Barcelona at Wembley.

SQUAD

GOALKEEPERS: Ivica Kralj (PSV Eindhoven/Ned), Zeljko Cleovic (Las Palmas/Spa), Miroslav Koric (FK Obilje)

DEFENDERS: Ivan Dudic (Red Star Belgrade), Slobodan Komljenovic (Kaiserslautern/Ger), Miroslav Djukic (Valencia/Spa), Sinisa Mihajlovic (Lazio/Ita), Nisa Saveljic (Bordeaux/Fra), Goran Bunjevcevic (Red Star Belgrade), Goran Djorovic (Celta Vigo/Spa)

MIDFIELDERS: Slavisa Jokanovic (Deportivo La Coruna/Spa), Vladimir Jugovic (Inter Milan/Ita), Albert Nadj (Real Oviedo/Spa), Dejan Stankovic (Lazio/Ita), Jovan Stankovic (Real Mallorca/Spa), Ljubinko Drulovic (Porto/Port), Dragan Stojkovic (Nagoya Grampus Eight/Jpn), Dejan Govedarica (RKC Waalwijk/Ned)

FORWARDS: Predrag Mijatovic (Fiorentina/Ita), Savo Milesevic (Real Zaragoza/Spa), Darko Kovacevic (Juventus/Ita), Mateja Kezman (Partizan Belgrade)

Germany v Romania: It's grit against flair

UNDATED, June 11: A strangely harmonious German squad kick off their Euro 2000 campaign against Romania here on Monday in both countries' first Group A game which serves as a litmus test for both countries' aspirations.

In-fighting, back-biting and general conflict are usually the norm for Germans in major tournaments with feuds running daily in press reports.

Coach Erich Ribbeck may have had a run-in with Jens Jeremies, on whom he slapped a one-match suspension for criti-

but the decision belongs to the coach.

Ribbeck did not name his starting 11 but gave a strong indication with an 11-a-side game which had Oliver Bierhoff playing with Ulf Kirsten as their strike duo.

AC Milan's Bierhoff, a national hero when his golden goal won Euro 96 for Germany, said he fully expected to play. "I think and I hope I will play during training. In any case I showed against the Czech Republic I was in good form."



German superstar Lothar Matthäus in training at Kerkade on June 9. Germany face Romania in a Euro 2000 Group A match today.

—AFP photo

cising him, before the event, but no real controversy has so far been evident at their base in Vaals, Netherlands near the German border.

During the victorious 1996 finals, they had day after day of in-fighting among their injury-hit squad and even had UEFA permission to call up additions such as the length of their injury list.

So far, it's been relatively tame though cynics might say it's just a question of time before a Pandora's box is opened by someone airing their views in public.

As they always say though, you can never write off the Germans.

Injured players Lothar Matthäus and Jens Jeremies will almost certainly play, coach Erich Ribbeck said on Saturday, which is a major boost to the team.

Matthäus picked up a right thigh injury in the 8-2 win over Liechtenstein on Wednesday and Jeremies hurt his left knee in Friday evening training.

The 39-year-old Matthäus and tough midfielder Jeremies are key players in Ribbeck's defence of their European title which they won four years ago in England with a 2-1 final victory over Czech Republic.

"Lothar took part in training," Ribbeck told a press conference on Saturday. "That shows he's back to full fitness and, but for something out of the ordinary, he will be playing."

Since arriving at their base, Matthäus, who skipped Germany's World Cup winning side in 1990, had merely undergone light training. On Saturday he had a full session however.

"Since Wednesday, my treatment has been effective," said Matthäus. "Today I was able to deal with all the problems. I think that with extra training till Monday, everything will be fine."

"I am more confident today

Apart from Bierhoff and Kirsten, Ribbeck fielded Oliver Kahn, Lothar Matthäus, Thomas Linke, Jens Nowotny, Markus Babel, Jens Jeremies, Christian Ziege, Thomas Hassler and Mehmet Scholl.

After a two-year absence from the squad, Hassler looks set to start a competitive match which will be a disappointment for Liverpool's Dietmar Hamann who might have played in his place.

Romania may be the underdogs but skipper Gheorghe Hagi and his teammates claimed they could pull off a historic win.

Romania have never won a match at a European Championships and Hagi, who lifted the UEFA Cup with Galatasaray in Copenhagen last month, was asked if that barren streak was about to end.

"I hope so," he told reporters at their training ground on Saturday. "I hope so. One day you have to begin."

Hagi, who revealed plans to retire after this tournament, said: "Every game is going to be difficult. With Germany, both teams will be wanting to make a good start and I think it's going to be a good game."

Whether Teutonic self-assurance reasserts itself as it has in the past or whether Romania go on to claim a famous win, the world of football will surely be taking in every detail.

ENGLAND-PORTUGAL

England manager Kevin Keegan has talked a good game since taking over from Glenn Hoddle at the start of last year, but against Portugal on Monday night he will discover just how good his team is — with or without Alan Shearer.

England, semifinalists when they staged the championship four years ago, believe they are good enough to make the last four again, but of all the major nations at Euro 2000 they are

the most difficult to predict. Few would question that they boast a clutch of world-class players in Alan Shearer, Michael Owen, David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Tony Adams, but whether they can get together into an effective team is another matter.

Their form has been fitful under Keegan although there were promising signs against Brazil and Ukraine in their recent warm-up matches at Wembley.

In Eindhoven on Monday, they face a Portugal side who England captain Alan Shearer believes are "as technically gifted as any in the world" but one lacking a truly dangerous striker.

Both teams are keeping their tactical plan closely under wraps, but the match poses an interesting dilemma for the coaches who have both stressed that a draw would not be a bad result.

A victory would represent a giant step towards reaching the quarter-finals but a defeat would demand a riskier, more offensive approach in the other two group games while increasing the mental pressure on the players.

It is difficult, however, to imagine the attack-minded Keegan fielding a team aimed at containing the Portuguese and hitting them on the counter charge.

During his time as coach at Newcastle United, Keegan won Plaudits for his 'champane' football and in some matches he would even field four forwards.

Newcastle, though, never won a trophy under Keegan and since taking over the national team the former England captain has been far less cavalier in his tactical approach, conscious that a single defeat in international football, unlike in league games, can be disastrous.

Both teams have injury worries over key players ahead of the Group A match with England's leading goalscorer Shearer struggling to shake off a knee ligament injury and Portugal midfielder looking doubtful after picking up a right thigh strain.

Michael Owen, one of the stars of France 98, is certain to start in attack and will be partnered by either Emile Heskey, Robbie Fowler or Kevin Phillips if Shearer is unfit.

David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Paul Ince are likely to start in midfield but the biggest selection question is who will join them on the left side.

Dennis Wise, Steve McNamara and Nick Barmby, none of them natural left footers, have all been tried there in recent matches.

If Keegan wants creative flair he is likely to opt for McNamara or Barmby, but if he decides to play it safe he will go for Wise — not least because his tigerish qualities will help snuff out the threat of Luis Figo, Portugal's most dangerous player, on the right.

The Neville brothers, Gary and Phil, should start in the full-back slots with veteran defender Tony Adams and Sol Campbell in the centre of defence and David Seaman in goal.

Portugal will probably play a 4-2-3-1 system with either Sa Pinto or youngster Nuno Gomes the lone striker in front of an impressive attacking midfield of Figo, Rui Costa and Joao Pinto.

The industrious Paulo Bento is likely to start along side Sousa or Vidigal just behind with a back four of Secretario, Fernando Couto, Jorge Costa and Dimas in front of Keeper Vitor Baia.

Kirin Cup

Japan, Slovakia split points

MIVAGI, Japan, June 11: Japan's Olympic player Shunsuke Nakamura fired home an equalizer to hold Slovakia to a 1-1 draw in the opener of the Kirin Cup football tournament on Sunday, reports AFP.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Q R M H F Z C I L H M I H C O D T.

Yesterdays Cryptoquip: IF A TEENAGE FROG SAW SOMETHING REALLY GREAT, HE'D SAY "TODDLY AWESOME!"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: E equals D

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that it equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

STARWATCH

Sinisa Mihajlovic (Yugoslavia)

PARIS, June 11 (Internet): The midfielder-cum-defender first gained prominence with the FK Crvena Zvezda side that won the European Champion



Cups Cup in 1990/91. Initially a left-sided midfielder, he has matured into a stylish sweeper or centre-half since his move to Italy. After spells with AS Roma and Sampdoria UC, he has reached his peak with S.S. Lazio, adding a

league champions' medal in May to the European Cup Winners' Cup winners' medal he picked up in 1999.

A classy defender, exceptionally confident on the ball, he possesses exceptional dead-ball ability, holding the current Serie A record for goals scored from free-kicks. Whether whipping in corners or free-kicks, Mihajlovic poses an awesome threat.

The son of a Serbian father and Croat mother, the 30-year-old Mihajlovic is desperate to have an impressive Championship after producing several disappointing displays for his country during the 1998 World Cup.

And after standing out as Yugoslavia's most impressive player during the qualifying round for this summer's tournament, many of Europe's top goalkeepers will be wary of any free-kicks that are given away within a 35-yard radius of goal when Mihajlovic is on the field. In fact, it is only the slight injury cloud which hangs over him ahead of Yugoslavia's opening match with Slovenia that could threaten his chances of proving to the rest of Europe just what a fine all-round player he really is.

To date, he has played 44 internationals scoring 6 goals.