



EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



Spain's

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ons Juventus - with whom Vladimir Jugovic won the European Cup in 1996, while Florentina's Predrag Mijatovic scored the only goal of the 1998 European Cup final for Real Madrid.

Add to that Slavisa Jokanovic from new Spanish champions Deportivo La Coruna and Miroslav Djukic, a European Cup finalist last month with Valencia, and there can be few doubts about the outcome on Tuesday.

Slovenia's side inevitably draws heavily on their country's top side, NK Maribor, plus a number of journeymen playing in Austria, Switzerland and Croatia.

Yugoslavia's assistant coach Zoran Filipovic made no bones about it: "We are very optimistic about our chances of qualifying from this group. We know that the opening game against Slovenia will be far from easy, but we are relaxed."

Djukic was equally to the point, saying: "We feel obliged to win this one."

However, Yugoslavia may well have felt the same way about the South China/Hong Kong Select XI they faced last week in the former British colony - only to come away with a humiliating 4-2 defeat.

Though it's dangerous to compare friendlies with competition matches, the debacle which one Yugoslav newspaper dubbed "Four slaps in the face in Hong Kong" may well have left its mark.

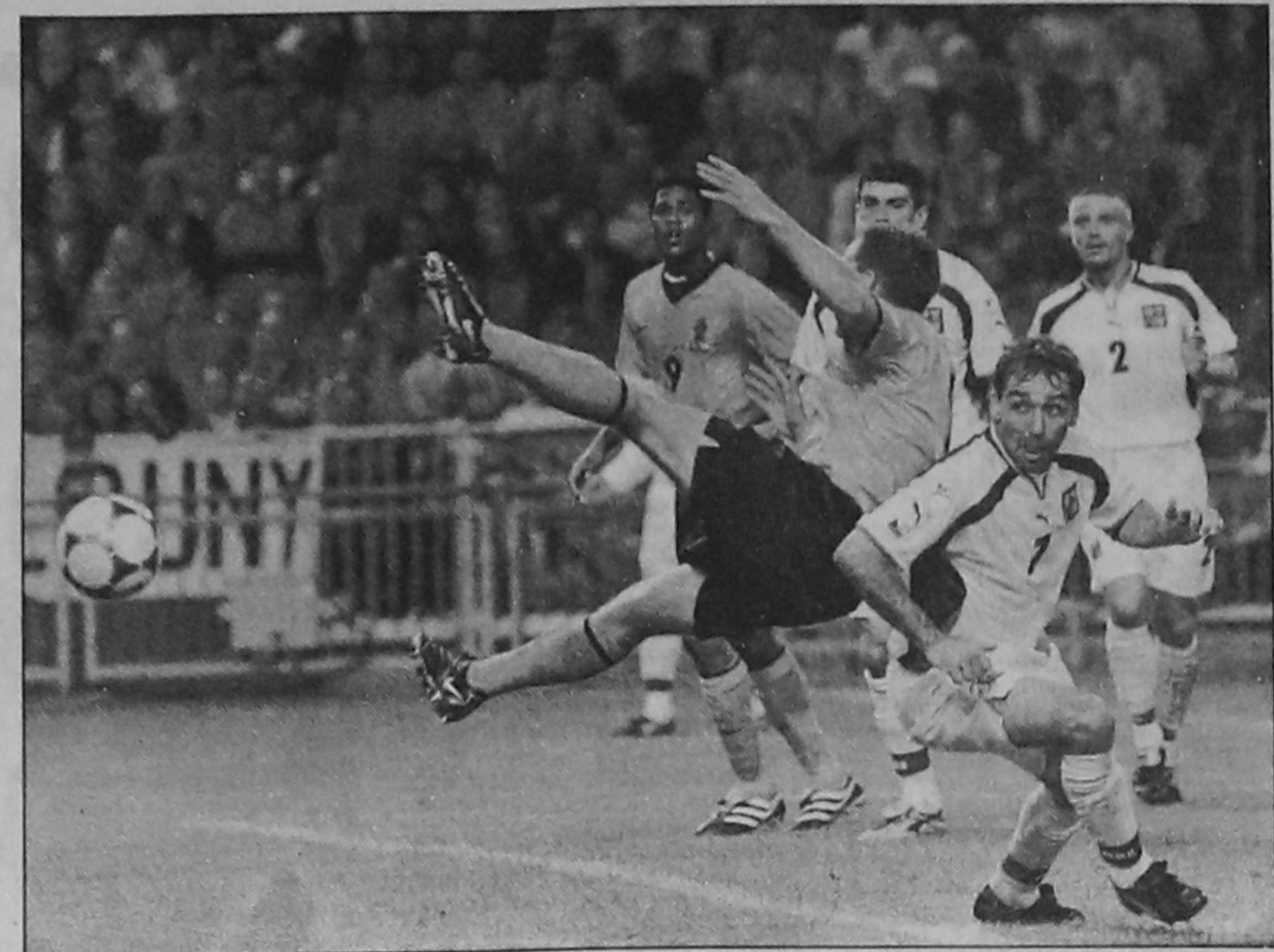
Slovenia, which gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, has a proven marksman in Zlatko Zahovic, who scored nine goals during qualifying and won three Portuguese league titles with FC Porto, scoring seven times in six group games for them in the 1998-99 Champions League.

Yugoslavia's defence may not be the toughest at these championships, but if they can keep tabs on Zahovic, there should be little to stop Boskov's men celebrating an ideal start to the championships.

TEAMS (PROBABLE)

YUGOSLAVIA: Ivica Kralj; Slobodan Komljenovic (Ivan Djukic), Albert Nadj (Goran Djurovic), Miroslav Djukic, Sinisa Mihajlovic; Dejan Stankovic, Vladimir Jugovic, Dragomir Stojkovic, Jovan Stankovic; Predrag Mijatovic, Darko Kovacevic (Mateja Kezman).

SLOVENIA: Mladen Dabanic (Marko Simeunovic); Zeljko Milinovic, Darko Milanic, Marinko Galic (Aleksander Knavas); Doini Novak, Ales Ceh, Saso Udovic, Zlatko Zahovic, Miran Pavlin; Mladen Rudonja, Erman Siljak.



WAS IT OR WASN'T IT? Ronald de Boer (L), the Dutch forward, taking a tumble apparently after a foul pressure by Czech defender Jiri Nemec (No 7). The referee awarded a penalty for the incident.

Latal's dubious distinction

AMSTERDAM, June 12: It is sure to become a staple of sports quiz competitions in years to come, reports Reuters.

QUESTION: Which player got the red card 20 minutes after being substituted in a major European soccer tournament?

ANSWER: Radoslav Latal of the Czech Republic.

Italian referee Pierluigi Collina produced the red card when Latal and a number of Czech players jumped off the bench and argued with fourth official Kyros Vassaras of Greece.

Their frustration had boiled over following a disputed late penalty which condemned them to a 1-0 defeat by co-hosts the Netherlands in Euro 2000 on Sunday night.

Czech coach Jozef Chovanec said he felt the red card was an overreaction from Collina, the bald headed Italian who is one of the world's best known referees.

"I don't think our player broke the rules. He was standing in the dug-out and he didn't come out of the technical area," Chovanec told reporters.

"I personally think it was not necessary to give him this penalty."

Latal, a veteran of the Czech squad which were runners-up in Euro 96, will now be suspended for the Czech Republic's match with world champions France on Friday.

Latal was sent off in the quarter-finals of Euro 96 and missed the semifinal and final through suspension.

Collina awarded a controversial penalty to the Dutch in the 89th minute when Jiri Nemec appeared to tug the shirt of Barcelona player's performance. "I wanted to use Overmars as a substitute to bring the game open if necessary."

Man-of-the-match Nedved was delighted with their performance despite defeat. "I think we played a fantastic match. I think it's the first time in my life I have lost a game in such a style."

Both Chovanec and Czech midfilder Ravel Nedved tried to be diplomatic about the incident but their fury was clear.

"The penalty... I recommend you ask someone else," Chovanec said.

Nedved said he was disappointed with the decision of Collina to give Radoslav Latal, who had been substituted, a red card while on the bench moments before the match.

"I am very sorry for the thousands of Czech supporters who came to Amsterdam to support us and were rewarded in such a manner," he said.



Thierry Henry (R) exults after scoring the second French goal against Denmark in their Euro 2000 Group D opener on June 11 at Bruges. Teammate Laurent Blanc (L) is joining in the celebration.

— AFP photo

Unconvincing Dutch victory

ROTTERDAM, June 12: It never became a crisis of finger in the dyke proportions but Holland's 1-0 sneaked win over the Czech Republic at the Amsterdam ArenA on Sunday could so easily have opened the floodgates, reports AFP.

In the end it was the Czechs who were crying at the final whistle after Frank de Boer's 89th minute penalty earned a victory in their opening Euro 2000 match very much against the run-of-play.

A cross from substitute Marc Overmars did not look particularly dangerous but Jiri Nemec tugged at the shirt of Holland's Ronald de Boer.

Italian referee Pierluigi Collina had no hesitation in awarding the penalty and Ronald's brother Frank tucked away the penalty to earn a priceless win for the co-hosts.

It was Holland's first competitive match since their World Cup semi-final defeat at the hands of Brazil and the match will not have impressed the footballing purists.

A nervous, out-of-form Dutch side ran out of steam after the first half hour and could so easily have conceded goals when Pavel Nedved hit the post and a Jan Koller header bounced back off the crossbar.

Rijkarda said at the post-match press conference: "It's

true that the Czechs were very unlucky today but if you win a game it's always deserved. We started well and dominated the game in the first half hour. Then the match slipped away from us and they started to create some chances."

He said tactically they lost out because they left wide open spaces on the right when nobody covered when Bergkamp, given a free role, moved out of position.

In the 63rd minute Jan Koller, fed by Poborsky, headed onto the woodwork with keeper Edwin van der Sar well beaten and Nedved then headed the ball against the post from a Jiri Nemec cross, van der Sar retrieving the ball as it bounced on the line.

The 51,000 supporters, nestled in the gladiatorial-style arena, were satisfied however when Ronald de Boer's shirt was tugged and his twin brother and skipper Frank knocked away the penalty.

Rijkarda said on the incident: "Someone took Ronald de Boer by his shirt and I could say he was being held by a defender."

Jaap Stam left the field for several minutes midway through the second half leaving Holland to play with 10 men and Rijkarda explained what was going on. He said Stam

came off and needed stitches above his eye.

The medical staff told Rijkarda Stam was fit to play on but the player himself said he felt slightly concussed and Bert Konterman took his place. "I will never put my players in danger," Rijkarda said.

He said Overmars was in fact fit to play but he decided to field Boudewijn Zenden on the left of the attack and he claimed his decision was vindicated by the Barcelona player's performance. "I wanted to use Overmars as a substitute to bring the game open if necessary."

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