

EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



Spain's

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ons Juventus - with whom Vladimir Jugovic won the European Cup in 1996, while Fiorentina'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 it's 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 Kralic, Slobodan Komljenovic (Ivan Djuric), Albert Nadj (Goran Djorovic), Miroslav Djukic, Sinisa Mihajlovic, Dejan Stankovic, Vladimir Jugovic, Dragomir Stankovic, Jovan Stankovic, Predrag Mijatovic, Darko Kovacevic (Mateja Kezman).

SLOVENIA: Mladen Dabancovic (Marko Simeunovic), Zeljko Milinovic, Darko Milanic, Marinko Galic (Aleksander Knazs), Dojko Novak, Ales Ceh, Slavko Udovic, Zlatko Zahovic, Miran Pavlin, Mladen Rudonja, Erman Siljak.

TOURNEY TREATS

UNDATED, (AFP/AP) June 12: Euro 2000 briefs on Monday.

BOOKIES BACK FRANCE
France's sparkling 3-0 opening win over Denmark has installed them as the new bookmakers' favourites for the Euro 2000 crown.

The world champions are quoted at 3/1 by William Hill. Co-hosts Holland drop down to 100/30 after they were lucky to defeat the Czech Republic 1-0 with a late penalty goal in the other Group D match. Next are Spain 11/2, Italy 13/2, England 8/1, Belgium 12/1 and Germany at 12/1.

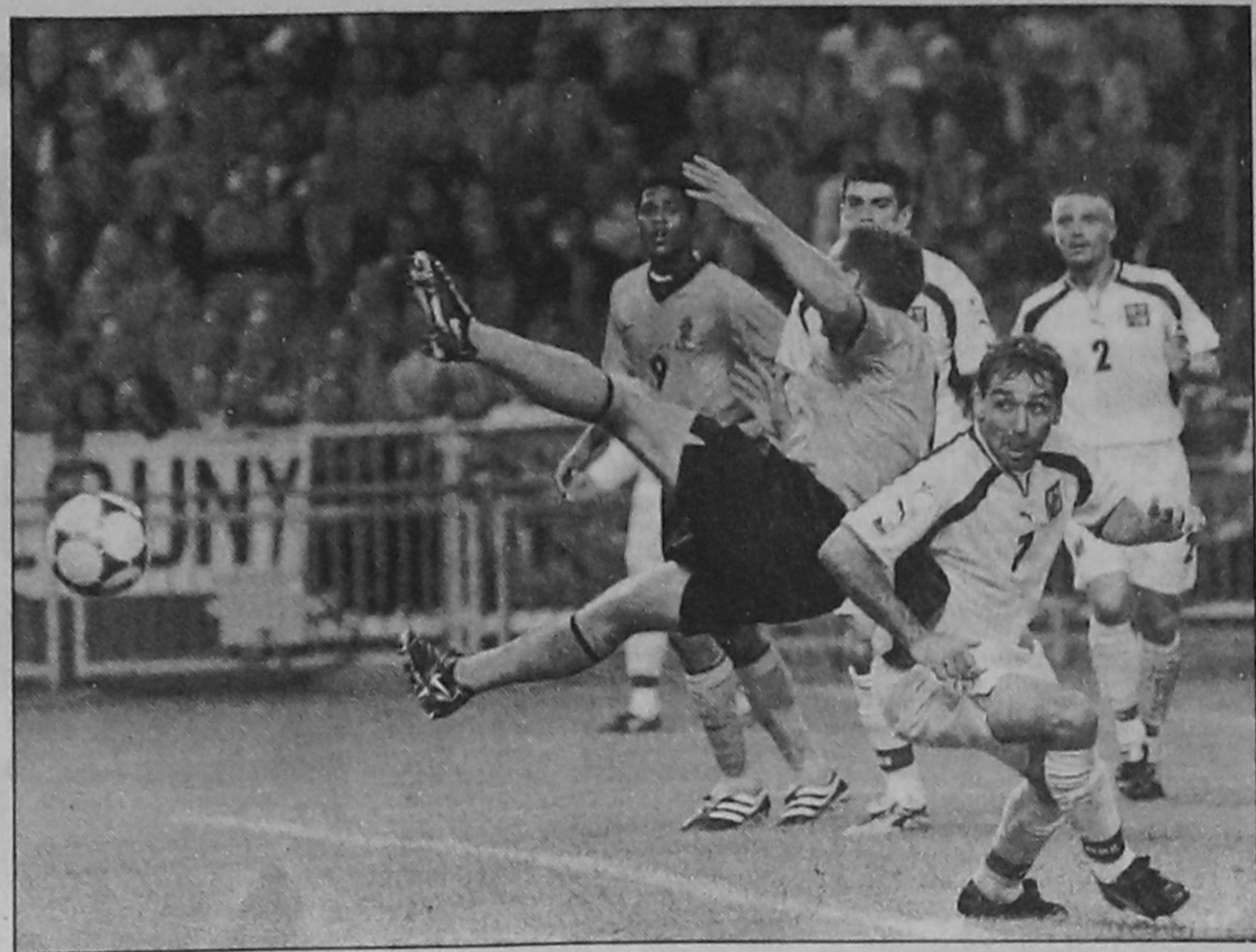
HOME COOKING FOR ITALIANS
Italy are taking no risks with the food in Belgium and the Netherlands. Zoff's side have brought with them 350 kilograms of pasta, 300 kgs of parmesan cheese, 100 kgs of flour, 75 kgs of rice, 38 litres of oil, 70 litres of virgin olive oil and a lorry-load of Italian mineral water and fruit juice.

WASEIGE NOT AMUSED
Belgian coach Robert Waseige was in no mood for a celebratory drink of whisky the day after his side's 2-1 opening win over Sweden. He woke to find several Belgian newspapers carrying a photo of him in association with a well-known brand of whisky to mark Father's Day in Belgium. "Robert, father of the Belgians" went the caption. Waseige has taken legal action.

JUVENTUS TOP CLUB
Italian side Juventus have the most players of any club at the Euro 2000 finals with 13 taking part. These include nine Italians and four non-Italians. A close second with 11 are Liverpool and Turkey's UEFA champions Galatasaray with 11 each. Spanish giants Barcelona are next with 10 players taking part.

A CENTURY OF HOLLIGANISM
One way to kick hooligan habit is to start a hard-rock band.

A three-year dream has come true for five Belgians who struck up a chord and formed a "street-core" or hard-rock band, called the "Thuggers". They released their first CD single to coincide with the opening kick-off of Euro 2000. The single, called "Football on Saturday", is about three



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. — AFP photo

Unconvincing Dutch victory

ROTTERDAM, June 12: It never became a crisis of finger in the dyke proportions but Holland's 1-0 sneak 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 tugged 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. Rijkaard 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.

Rijkaard 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 Rijkaard explained what was going on. He said Stam

came off and needed stitches above his eye.

The medical staff told Rijkaard 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," Rijkaard 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."

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."

"We had prepared for two years for this match and this competition and I could see the result. Unfortunately we could not do more."

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. "In my opinion, he (Collina) had some personal influence in this match but I do not have anything against him," Nedved said.

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 Ronald de Boer, who tumbled to the floor theatrically.

Czech anger was compounded by a sense of injustice as they had dominated the second half and twice struck the woodwork. A number of Czech players were in tears at the final whistle.

Both Chovanec and Czech midfielder 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 for the Czech followers who had made the long journey to the Netherlands.

"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

French lesson for Denmark

BRUGES, Belgium, June 12: France's bid to add the European title to their world crown got off to a blistering start with an impressive 3-0 win over Denmark in the Euro 2000 group D opener here on Sunday, reports AFP.

Roger Lemerre's side, with eight players in their starting line-up who played some part in the 3-0 win over Brazil in the World Cup Final, proved too strong in the end for a Danish team missing a clutch of key players through injury.

Veteran defender Laurent Blanc opened the scoring after 16 minutes before strikers Thierry Henry and Sylvain Wiltord, a second half substitute for Nicolas Anelka, netted after the interval to give the French a comfortable victory after some early scares.

Denmark found it difficult to cope with the pace of Henry and Anelka as the front two launched a string of lightning attacks that often left the Scandinavian defence chasing shadows.

France's World Cup hero Zinedine Zidane, who had a hand in both second-half goals, was pleased with the opening win.

"We wanted to win this match and it is a good thing to have succeeded in doing so," said the Juventus player. "But this win gives us no certainty for the rest of the tournament. I wish I could have found (with his passes) the strikers a bit more but it's good for an opening match."

Inter Milan's Blanc, who revealed on the eve of the match that he would leave the international stage after Euro 2000, fired "Les Bleus" into the lead in the 16th minute with his 16th goal for his country.

Anelka, who had fluffed two earlier chances, raced towards goal and when goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel burst off his line to challenge the Real Madrid striker the ball spun loose to

the right of the area.

With no defenders in sight, 34-year-old Blanc, who had made a surprising run from deep, stroked a low shot into the back of the net with Schmeichel scrambling to make it back to his line.

That steadied French nerves after an early Danish onslaught.

Feyenoord striker Jon Dahl Tomasson should have put the 1992 European champions in front in the second minute when he raced clear on goal only to see his weak, low shot saved by Fabien Barthez.

Barthez, who joined Manchester United from Monaco shortly before Euro 2000, had to be at his sharpest minutes later when a poor headed clearance by Lilian Thuram left him exposed.

Ebbe Sand shot from eight yards out but the shaven-headed stopper dropped smartly to his right to tip the ball around the post for a corner.

At the other end, Anelka had two gilt-edged opportunities to put his team in front, the first when he was dispossessed on the edge of the area as he went for goal when he could have passed to the unmarked Zidane on his right.

Minutes later, he raised his eyes to the heavens when he rounded Schmeichel and fired into the side netting after his pace had left the Danish defence trailing in his slipstream.

In the second half, Henry, who joined Arsenal shortly after Anelka left for Spain at the end of the 1998/99 season, put the result beyond doubt with an individual goal of the highest quality after 64 minutes.

Racing onto a Zinedine Zidane pass he sprinted out of the French half into the left of the Denmark area and tucked a neat shot into the far corner.

France finished the match with a flourish when Wiltord rounded off a superb move. Zidane burst through the

middle and laid the ball off for the overlapping Patrick Vieira who slid the ball across goal for the Bordeaux striker to score at the far post.

Wiltord had initially been offside when Zidane played in Vieira but checked his run before collecting a pass from the Arsenal player.

Jesper Gronkjaer was cautioned for his protests after the goal as the Danes finally caved in.

France, whose France 98 survivors are all wearing the same shirt numbers they were allocated for the World Cup, went through some familiar pre-match rituals that marked that campaign with Blanc kissing the bald head of goalkeeper Barthez before the match.

Barthez played down the impressive start for the World Cup holders, saying: "It's a good start, nothing more nothing less. There are things we must look at again, things that weren't quite right. We must keep working, our game is not yet completely in place."

Blanc missed the final win against Brazil through suspension while Henry, France's top scorer in France 98, did not feature in the final while Anelka was not in the squad.

Despite his praise for his team French coach Lemerre, assistant to Anne Jacquet during the victorious World Cup campaign, was less admiring of the French media who Saturday had boycotted his press conference in protest at the refusal of 14 of France's squad of 22 to speak to the media.

"The (post-match) press conference protocol is an obligation so I have relented (in attending)," said Lemerre. "Saturday you sent me back to my penalty area (boycotting Lemerre's conference) but the football is the most important. France have won again."

Watch out for Del Piero

ARNHEM, Netherlands, June 12(AFP): Italy may not have been totally convincing as they beat Turkey 2-1 in their Euro 2000 opener here on Sunday - but in Alessandro Del Piero they have a star ready to light up the tournament.

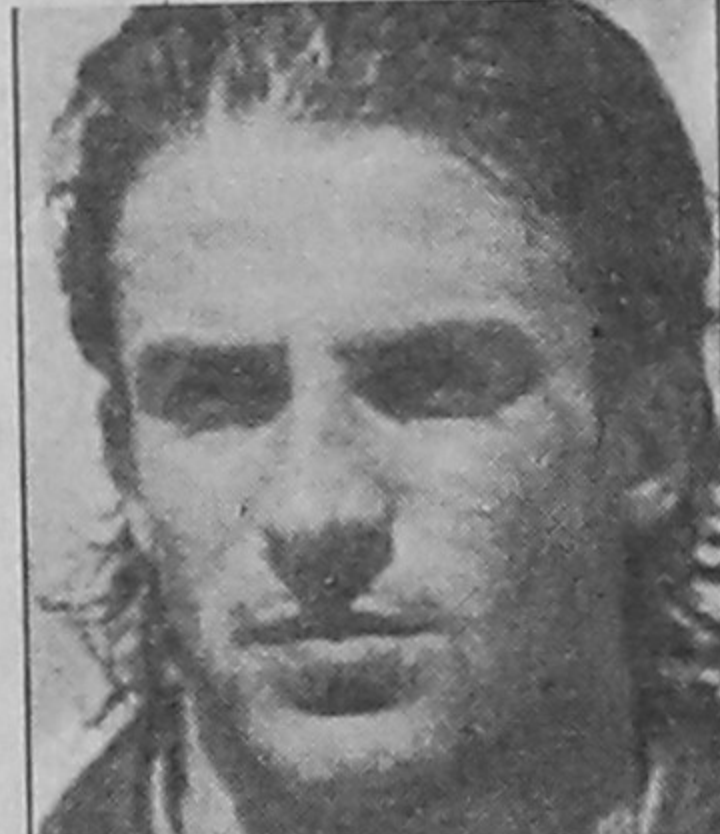
With the scores locked at 1-1, Filippo Inzaghi's controversial spot-kick after 70 minutes proved decisive for Dino Zoff's men at the Gelredome.

Five minutes later, Del Piero, who has scored just one goal in open play since October 1998 in the Serie A, took the stage.

Despite a dip in form over the past season, Del Piero's popularity remains as strong as ever and the illustrious number 10 arrived to a rapturous ovation from the small Italian contingent behind the goal.

Sporting fluorescent boots and looking every inch a 'boy band' frontman, Del Piero came on for Stefano Fiore and quickly showed the 28,000 crowd why he carries one of the heaviest wallets in the modern game.

Presented with a free kick



outside the penalty area, the 26-year-old striker who first made his name in the small northern town of Padova, curled in a vicious free-kick which rattled the Turkish crossbar.

The Juventus hitman, who demanded the ball in every attack as the Italians surged forward in search of a third goal, was then unlucky to see a low shot fly inches wide of keeper Rustu Rieker's right hand post after a solo dribble.

Looking dangerous every time he touched the ball, he saw

another shot scrambled off the line by Alpay Ozalan.

In injury-time, Del Piero set up fellow substitute Angelo Di Livio for a first-time shot into the back of the net - only to see the effort ruled off-side in another controversial decision by Scottish referee Hugh Dallas.

In just 15 minutes on the pitch, the man who earns 10 billion lira a year (4.83 million dollars) and whose poster adorns the walls of thousands of teenagers' bedrooms, had four strikes on goal - not bad for a player keeping the substitutes' bench warm for most of the match.

Del Piero has been struggling to recapture the kind form he showed before ripping cruciate ligaments in a league match against Udinese in November 1998, an injury that brought his season to a premature end.

But if he can turn on the class at Euro 2000 - and stay out of harm's way - Del Piero may yet steer the Squadra Azzurra to their first European Championship trophy since 1968. And then, no-one in a delirious Italy would begrudge Del Piero a single lira of his handsome salary.

18 Dutch thugs arrested

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, June 12: Police arrested 18 Dutch soccer fans who broke windows or ignored police orders to disperse as celebrations of the national team's first victory got out of hand, an official said Monday, reports AP.

Police made the arrests after closing off large portions of the city center where parties had spread into the streets and some supporters threw illegal fireworks.

"We were in large numbers and decided to make arrests to prevent the situation from escalating," said police spokesman Ron Kouwenhoven. He added that many of the fans refused to leave the area and tried to provoke police.

In the nearby town of Delft, about 200 fans roamed the streets, but no major damage was reported.

The incidents occurred hours after the Dutch struggled to a 1-0 win over the Czech Republic Sunday night in Amsterdam.



THE WORLD IS ORANGE: Dutch fans, clad in the traditional orange colour of the national squad, greeting their team's entry into the Amsterdam Arena pitch prior to their Euro 2000 clash against the Czech Republic on June 11. — AFP photo

World champs mean business

BRUGES, France, June 12(AFP): They're back and better than ever: France's sparkling 3-0 win over Denmark in their Euro 2000 opener has seen them installed as the new title favourites, reports AFP.

"We're off and running just like in 98," ran the front page headline in L'Equipe, referring to the last finals match the French played, the 3-0 win over Brazil in the World Cup final in July, 1998.

And as an added plus the world champions appear to

have solved one of the biggest mysteries of world football: how can France produce year after year great midfielders and defenders, but fail to find any top strikers?

The strike-force partnership of Arsenal's Thierry Henry and Real Madrid's Nicolas Anelka, playing for just the second time together, was impressive, tearing great holes in an over-stretched Danish defence.

Anelka could have scored twice himself in the first half as his pace left the Danish defenders stranded. It was his lunge at goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel's feet that produced the loose ball from which Laurent Blanc opened the score after 16 minutes.

Henry took over after that and his 64th minute strike from a Zinedine Zidane's flick was sheer class, speeding away from the Danes and curling a right-footer around Schmeichel.

France are a fantastic team and when they have the ball at their feet they have a lot of speed which you saw in evidence tonight," said Denmark's Swedish coach Bo Johansson.

"But it is not just their pace - they are extremely good all-round footballers as well."

French coach Roger Lemerre was delighted with the performance, saying: "These world champions have a desire that has stayed the same for two years. Sometimes you just have to pay tribute to them."

Even the normally stone-faced Anelka was uncharacteristically upbeat. "It's easy to play football with Zidane. We can achieve a lot of things together," he said with a big smile.

The 1998 world-footballer-of-the-year Zidane was imperious against the Danes, deftly probing and pulling the Danes

out of position. He never wasted a ball and his flicks and feints created spaces for the youthful front two.

The only cloud on the horizon was the hesitant start made by the ageing French defence which conceded two goals against both Japan and Slovenia in warm-up matches for Euro 2000.

But after riding out the early Danish storm, Blanc, Marcel Desailly, Lilian Thuram and Bixente Lizarazu gradually found their marks as Zidane and the French attack pinned back the Danes.

There also remains a question mark over whether the French are better with Arsenal's Patrick Vieira in the line-up from the start allowing Zidane to move into a more forward position.

The French hit top gear only when Vieira came on after 58 minutes in place of Youri Djorkaeff who plays a roving role on the right flank.

But tactical options apart, the French have seldom looked better and they approach their remaining two Group D qualifiers against the Czech Republic and the Netherlands with something approaching a swagger.

53 German trouble-makers sent back

BRUSSELS, June 12: High-lighting increased security checks at the border, Belgian police sent 53 known hooligans back to Germany ahead of their national team's first Euro 2000 game against Romania on Monday, reports AP.