

# EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



## Molina costs Spain dear, brilliant Yugoslav rally



**FATAL MISJUDGMENT:** Towering Norwegian striker Steffen Iversen(L) takes advantage and heads to score as Spanish custodian Francisco Molina mis-reads the flight of the ball during their Group C match at Rotterdam on June 13.

BRUSSELS, June 14: Norway sat proudly on top of Group C Tuesday after a 1-0 victory over Spain at Rotterdam as the Euro 2000 formbook was torn to shreds, reports AFP.

A solitary goal from Steffen Iversen, after a dreadful gaffe from Spanish keeper Francisco Molina, gave the Scandinavians pole position in the Group while much-fancied Spain - rooted at the bottom - have their work cut out if they are to progress to the last eight and bury their unwanted reputation as big-tournament chokers.

An even bigger shock was on the cards in the other Group C match in Charleroi, Belgium when rank outsiders Slovenia, the smallest nation ever to qualify for the European Championships, led 10-man Yugoslavia 3-0 with less than half an hour to play.

But Yugoslavia - tipped to progress alongside Spain before the matches kicked off - gave themselves a fillip by shrugging off the dismissal of their star player Sinisa Mihajlovic and grabbing a 3-3 draw.

Zlatko Zahovic grabbed two and Miran Pavlin one as a rampant Slovenia led 3-0.

But second-half substitute Savo Milosevic bagged a brace and Ljubinko Drulovic one as the Yugoslavs saved honour and a share of second-place in the pool.

**NORWAY 1 - SPAIN 0**

ROTTERDAM: Norway, took the honours for the day with their teamwork ethic proving too much for Spain's talented collection of individuals.

No-one epitomised that emphasis on the collective more than man-of-the-match Erik Mykland, who plays his club football for Greek side

Panathinaikos.

Mykland said: "As a team we love each other both on and off the pitch! We have a wonderful spirit and we play as a very solid unit making it difficult for teams to break us down - we are hard to play against."

But Norway's victory was in part due to a dreadful clanger from Molina, a surprise choice ahead of Santiago Canizares in the Spanish goal.

There was little danger when Norway goalkeeper Thomas Myrhe fired an aimless kick up field but Molina came haring out of his goal.

All Iversen had to do was get his head to it and the ball duly found the back of the unguarded net.

Spain coach Jose Antonio Camacho would not scapegoat Molina, however.

"It's no use blaming Molina. We are not here to criticise individuals. This sort of thing can happen to anyone," said Camacho.

But Camacho felt his team had been hard done by, saying: "We dominated but luck was not with us. On the other hand it was with Norway. It's a very disciplined and experienced team."

Norwegian coach Nils Johan Semb was overwhelmed by the result against one of the tournament favourites.

"This is a big victory for a small nation," he declared. "I am very proud of our team and I am glad that we showed the world that we can play football."

The match was also notable for two moments of refereeing history.

Egyptian Gamal El Ghanour became the first non-European referee to officiate in a

European Championship and then set another first when he awarded a freekick against Myrhe for the non-six-second rule - the Norwegian had held onto the ball for nine seconds.

Fran and Fernando Hierro worked the freekick but failed to get the ball past the wall with Salgado failing to convert the rebound.

**YUGOSLAVIA 3 - SLOVENIA 3**

CHARLEROI: The match saw Slovenia dominate a supposedly superior Yugoslavia for over an hour.

Slovenia, one of the countries that was created when Yugoslavia fragmented in the early 1990s, gave their footballing ex-compatriots a lesson with some scintillating football.

Zahovic was in the thick of things opening the scoring in the first half with a fine header and missing a glorious chance to make it 2-0.

But after the interval Yugoslavia seemed to be losing the plot completely.

Pavlin headed home a Zahovic freekick before a dreadful

Milosevic, who had replaced Darko Kovacevic, pulled one back from close range before Drulovic had time and space to place his shot past Mladen Dabunovic.

Milosevic completed the comeback with another shot from inside the six-yard box.

Zahovic and Milosevic are now joint top of the tournament goalscorers standings with two apiece.

Amazingly Boskov felt his team could have pulled off a victory.

"We started badly," said 69-year-old Boskov in arguably the understatement of the tournament so far. "It's a mystery to me how the team managed to wake up like that but suddenly they began to play, to go forward and eventually get the equaliser."

His Slovenian counterpart Srecko Katanec blamed lack of experience for his team's late collapse.

"Obviously it is very disappointing to concede three goals after Mihajlovic was sent off."



An ecstatic Yugoslav striker Savo Milosevic doesn't hide his feelings after netting one of his two goals against Slovenia on June 13.

misplaced pass by Mihajlovic gave Zahovic the third goal on a plate.

Veteran coach Vujadin Boskov was already ranting and raving on the touchline when Mihajlovic compounded his mistake by needlessly earning a red card when his unnecessary push on Slovenian Saso Udovic earned him a second caution just four minutes after the first.

Amazingly the dismissal of Mihajlovic, a freekick specialist and touted as Yugoslavia's top player, seemed to provide the kick up the backside that the pre-match favourites had needed.

said Katanec, who played under Boskov at Sampdoria. "It's a problem with experience. My team is lacking in it (experience). That's why Yugoslavia managed to get back level."

Mihajlovic will now miss his country's next match with Norway.

Zahovic, meanwhile, reflected on what might have been.

"I am especially satisfied with the way our team played. We were in dreamland for an hour. We played at more than 100 percent of our capacity but afterwards we paid for it," he mused.

## Early signs bright for France

BRUSSELS, June 14: France look even more like European champions, Germany look like promising outsiders and England seem to be heading home as the dust settles after the first round of matches at Euro 2000, reports AFP.

The formbook has been a mixed guide to the opening four days of the tournament, vindicating those who see France comfortably adding the European trophy to their 1998 World Cup, but betraying a number of others.

Germany looked at best mediocre in their draw with Romania, England's dreams of winning Euro 2000 were exposed as being just that by a farcical 3-2 defeat to Portugal, while Spain have been the biggest disappointment.

Italy and Holland did win their opening matches - though both after converting penalties which were generously awarded by the referee.

As one French TV commentator said after Italy's Filippo Inzaghi clattered to the floor against Turkey: "Is he looking for a job at Cine-Citta?" - the movie studios made famous by the late Federico Fellini.

But if Inzaghi's habit of taking the plunge was nothing out of the ordinary, Slovenia's 3-3 draw with 10-man Yugoslavia certainly was.

The match, along with Portugal's stirring rally at Eindhoven, was the most entertaining so far in the tournament.

For the purists though, France's clinical 3-0 demoli-

tion of 1992 champions Denmark was with it equal.

The smart money has to be piled on Roger Lemerre's team, which oozed class, pace and determination against the Danes despite a bungling start in defence.

Laurent Blanc, Lilian Thuram and Marcel Desailly looked liked they'd never met before, much less won the World Cup together.

However, "Les Bleus" gradually settled down, Zinedine Zidane began what proved to be another sparkling performance and France's quicksilver strikers Nicolas Anelka and Thierry Henry rang rings around Denmark's flat-footed defence.

And there was worse to come for France's rivals at Euro 2000. That they can field a World Cup-winning team is bad enough. But against Denmark, France showed they now have that kind of quality on the bench as well - their third goal arriving when substitute Sylvain Wiltord rifled home a cross from Patrick Vieira, himself another substitute.

However, if France were looking fluid, the German and Dutch footballing machines are clearly in need of a good oiling.

Trailing Romania 1-0 after conceding a soft goal, Europe's reigning champions didn't look any more convincing after Melmet Scholl's delightful 20-metre equaliser. Predictable moving forward, where they invariably sought out the head of Oliver Bierhoff, Germany were also prone to defensive lapses at

the back.

England's back four may already be a standing joke at Euro 2000, but they clearly have the quality moving forward to punish the Germans when the two sides meet for a crunch game in Group A on Saturday.

But if England have doubts about their defence, and the fitness of skipper Alan Shearer,

the major worry has to be over Kevin Keegan's tactical abilities.

To pitch only one defensive player (Paul Ince) in a four-man midfield against a side who are playing 4-5-1, with two of the best flair-players in modern football (Manuel Rui Costa and Luis Figo), is an error of school-boy proportions.



**JOLLY BUNCH:** The giant striker Jan Koller(C), flanked by his Czech Republic teammates, jogging during a training session at their Euro 2000 base in Knokke-Heist on June 13. The Czechs take on world champions France in a crucial Group D match on June 16.

## Press picks on Camacho's men

MADRID, June 14(AFP): The Spanish press blasted its footballers Wednesday after Jose Camacho's men once again failed to produce the goods at a major championship.

"Spain blows it again in the first round," lamented El Pais on its front page. "History repeats itself."

Another blast after a blunder by goalkeeper Jose Molina led to a 0-1 loss to unfancied Norway at the Euro 2000 finals in Rotterdam came from El Mundo.

"A Second Division goalkeeper, a Second Division Spain," ran its headline.

That was a not too subtle reference to the fact that Molina's club Atletico Madrid were relegated from Spain's top division last season.

"Spain, as usual: awful," said Diario 16. "Spain are not up to the mark," said ABC.

Taking a swipe at coach Jose Antonio Camacho, the Barcelona daily Vanguardia headlined "Camacho shipwrecked in the fjords."

Madrid sports daily As reflected on the irony of the defeat coming on Tuesday the 13th, for the superstitious in Spain a day of bad luck, a day to be avoided.

Spain once more were touted as one of the favourites for the Euro 2000 title after an impressive qualifying campaign which saw them win seven out of eight and score 42 goals for just five against.

## EURO 2000 GOAL SCORERS

BRUSSELS, June 14: Euro 2000 finals scorers after Tuesday's matches:-

2 - Zlatko Zahovic (Slo), Savo Milosevic (Yug)

1 - Bart Goor (Bel), Emile Mpenza (Bel), Johan Mjallby (Swe), Filippo Inzaghi (Ita), Antonio Conte (Ita), Okan Buruk (Tur), Laurent Blanc (Fra), Thierry Henry (Fra), Sylvain Wiltord (Fra), Frank de Boer (Ned), Viorel Moldovan (Rom), Mehmet Scholl (Ger), Paul Scholes (Eng), Steve McManaman (Eng), Luis Figo (Por), Joao Pinto (Por), Nuno Gomes (Por), Steffen Iversen (Nor), Miran Pavlin (Slo), Ljubinko Drulovic (Yug)

## Nedved doubtful for France clash

KNOKKE-HEIST, Belgium, June 14: Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved is in a race against time to be ready for Friday's Euro 2000 Group D match against world champions France in Bruges, reports AFP.

The Lazio player took an ankle knock in his side's bruising opener against the Netherlands on Sunday and it the injury has yet to clear up completely.

"I really hope that he is back to his best before Friday, because he is a key player in my line-up," said Czech coach Jozef Chovanec.

Nedved was outstanding against the Dutch and his absence would be a heavy blow for Chovanec, who already will have to do without the services of Patrick Berger and Radoslav Latal.

Berger was forced to sit out the first two games of Euro 2000 after being sent off in the qualifiers, while Latal was shown the red card for comments he made while sitting on the Czech bench after being substituted against the Netherlands.

"We need to beat France if we want to stay in the tournament, and in my opinion, they are the best team here," said Chovanec.

## Czechs vow to bounce back

KNOKKE-HEIST, Belgium, June 14: The Czech Republic insisted Tuesday that they had put their 1-0 defeat at the hands of co-hosts Holland in their Group D opener behind them, coach Jozef Chovanec said, reports AFP.

The Euro 96 runners-up, who won all 10 of their qualifying matches, dominated the second half but then capitulated to a 1-0 defeat after defender Jiri Nemec needlessly conceded an 89th-minute penalty converted by Frank De Boer.

But Chovanec, who must now prepare his side for their match with world champions France on Friday, insisted that the trauma was behind them, saying: "It's going better, we have turned the page."

Forward Vratislav Lokvenc, who has an injured knee, trained normally although he eased up towards the end of the session.

Pavel Nedved, the star performer against Holland, will definitely face Roger Lemerre's men despite injuries to his elbow and right leg.

But suspension deprives Chovanec of defender Radoslav Latal, sent off after being substituted against Holland, and Patrik Berger.

## England coaching staff hit back

SPA, Belgium, June 14: The England coaching staff vehemently denied accusations on Wednesday that their poor tactical strategy was the reason behind Monday's 3-2 defeat by Portugal.

During a hostile 30-minute inquisition by the English press, Les Reed, coach Kevin Keegan's tactical adviser, admitted the strategy against the Portuguese had failed.

But he hit back at the suggestion that the coaches were responsible for what many observers have described as a 'tactical fiasco', saying that the players themselves had simply

lost the man-to-man battle on the day.

Reed also denied reports that England's senior players were in revolt over the tactics which saw England field just one defensive midfielder, Paul Ince, against Portugal's five-man midfield, allowing Luis Figo and Rui Costa to wreak havoc.

"I am not aware of any rift in the England camp," said Reed. "I certainly haven't heard any of the players blaming the tactics."

"What is true is that the philosophy in the England camp is to let the players have their say. We actively encourage their feedback and input."



England manager Kevin Keegan listens while team spokesman Steve Double answers to questions from the media at Spa on June 13.

Reed said the coaching staff had sent a number of messages out onto the pitch after England had blown their two-goal lead against Portugal, but that the momentum of the opposition made it difficult for England to wrest back control of the game.

"It's like a boxing match," said Reed. "If a boxer gets knocked back on his heels, he knows he's got to get off the ropes or he will be beaten, but sometimes he just can't because of his opponent's attacks. It was like that on Monday."

"I thought we did well to keep getting forward, but unfortunately we were not so good at breaking them up."

"We sent on a lot of messages but you can't allow for how the players will respond, mentally and emotionally."

"At the end of the day, it is team versus team, man versus man. Once the players cross the line onto the pitch, there is a limit to how much the coaches can do. In the heat of the battle, circumstances are changing the whole time."

"We had a number of options before and during the match but we thought our plan to attack the Portuguese and to continue attacking them once they fought back was the right one."

While absolving the coaches of any responsibility, Reed was also keen to stress that the players were not to blame either, prompting one journalist to ask "who then was to blame?"

"I am not blaming the players at all," he said.

## Ribbeck rallies for Matthaeus

VAALS, Netherlands, June 14: German coach Erich Ribbeck is coming under a barrage of criticism for sticking by the world's most capped player, Lothar Matthaeus, in the German team at the Euro 2000 finals.

But Ribbeck insisted Wednesday that if the 39-year-old former skipper is fully fit, he will be a factor in the crunch Group A game against England in Charleroi on Saturday.

"There are still four days before the England game and I will see how he is doing in training," said the embattled Ribbeck.

"If he is not in better shape than he was in the latter stages of the match against Romania, I don't think he will be play on

Saturday," said Ribbeck.

Matthaeus was substituted after 77 minutes in the 1-1 draw against Romania.

"However I am working on the basis that he will be in better shape. I hope that the other players will see for themselves in training that he is on top form."

"Lothar is under a great deal of pressure, which I think is unfair. It's never good to put all the blame on the shoulders of one player. I have spoken with him and I will try to help him deal with the pressure," Ribbeck said.

"The German coach also denied reports that a player revolt was underway to get Matthaeus ejected from the German lineup."

The German press meanwhile continued to lambast their former skipper for his stuttering performance against Romania.

"The whole of Europe is accusing us. If you are real men, stand up and be counted. It's all boiling over because of Matthaeus," said the mass-circulation Bild.

The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung said that the other German players saw Matthaeus as a risk and that "they are starting to have had enough of doing the hard work for him."

"Hardly anyone wants to play with the old one anymore," said the Sueddeutsche Zeitung.

"After the poor performance against Romania, criticism is growing of Lothar Matthaeus," the Munich daily said. "Ribbeck let the young ones have their chance."

Die Welt went as far as to say that there was the threat of a player revolt against Matthaeus who left German champions Bayern Munich in May to finish off his career in the United States.

Same thing with the Westfalsche Allgemeine Zeitung which said: "Matthaeus has become a problem. Mutiny in the team. Jens Nowotny set to become the new leader."

Former defender Uli Stielike, sacked as Ribbeck's number two shortly before the Euro 2000 finals, said that it was only in the last 15 minutes of the Romania match, after Matthaeus had been brought off, that the defence looked secure.

Ribbeck's predecessor as coach Berti Vogts meanwhile added his pound of flesh by saying that "for me Nowotny is the best German defender."



Erich Ribbeck(L), the German coach and goalkeeper Oliver Kahn at a press conference at Vaals yesterday.

## Sympathy for Beckham!

LONDON, June 14: The leaders of football fans in England have made a plea for an end to the abuse directed at Manchester United midfielder David Beckham when he plays for the national side, reports AFP.

Beckham claims claims he and his pop star wife and baby were the subject of vile abuse from England fans at the end of Monday's 3-2 Euro 2000 finals defeat by Portugal in Eindhoven.

Beckham reacted angrily with a one-fingered gesture to

fans who had gathered round the players' tunnel leading from the pitch.

Beckham has received the support of England boss Kevin Keegan and the FA, and has escaped punishment by UEFA.

Now Ian Todd, chairman of the English National Federation of Football Supporters' Clubs has hit out.

Todd, who was at the match, told the Press Association: "There is no excuse for this. I feel for him - in fact anybody who has to suffer such abuse."

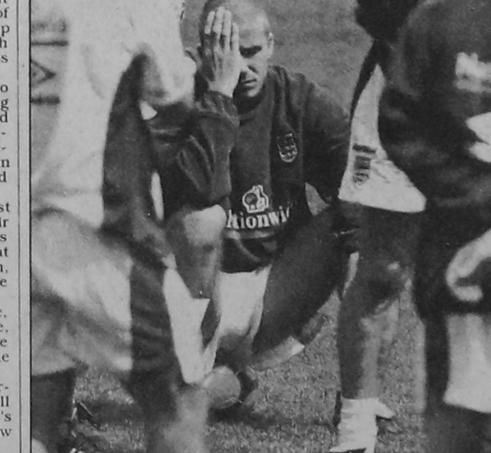
"It seemingly went beyond the sort of personal abuse players get on a regular basis, which is equally wrong."

"When it gets to the stage that your family is being abused that is completely out of order."

"We as an organisation are trying to produce a trouble-free tournament with everyone enjoying the occasion. Something like this taints everything that we are doing."

"Frankly I don't understand the minds of people who do such things. I suppose it starts with people being anti the team he plays for and because he's the main personality there, they turn on him."

"I have heard it around the country at league games, but I thought it had died down a lot now."



**POOR ME!** Controversial England superstar David Beckham shades his eyes from the sun during a practice session at Spa yesterday.

"But it seems to have surfaced again, and when Beckham is playing for England, which is disgraceful."

"My message to all the fans out in Holland and Belgium is to remember that everyone is playing for England and this sort of treatment is inexcusable."

Rogan Taylor, head of the football research unit at Liverpool University, added: "It all comes back to envy because of who he is and the club he plays for."

"What gets said by fans to rival players in league games is one thing, but it's surely different when it's England. The players are out there representing all of us."

David Beckham gives everything for his country, he's an outstanding player and he shouldn't have to put up with things like this anywhere.