



## Sport

# EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



## Portugal find a sensation

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, July 21 (AFP): A star was born for Portugal as Sergio Conceicao, whose name means conception, hit a hat-trick in their 3-0 victory over Germany in Euro 2000.

The 25-year-old Lazio playmaker, who was only a substitute against England and Romania coming on for Joao Pinto, made the most of his call-up as coach Humberto Coelho made nine changes from their 1-0 win over Romania.

Conceicao had only scored one goal in nine appearances in the qualifiers but he took his opportunity with gusto in his first start in a major championship.

The 25-year-old Lazio right winger caused a myriad of problems for the German rearguard.

A Pauleta cross from the left was deflected by defender Marko Rehmer high into the path of Conceicao at the far post in the 35th minute for a simple, close-range header to put them 1-0 ahead at the interval.

In the 54th minute, he received the ball on the right wing, cut inside Dietmar Hamann on the edge of the box and fired a left foot shot into the left side of the goal despite Thomas Linke's challenge for 2-0.

By this time, the Portuguese contingent in the 51,000 capacity De Kuip Stadium were already celebrating.

Conceicao just refused to concede the limelight however. He outpaced Linke and his right foot shot went sailing past Kahn's right hand to complete his hat-trick with just under 20 minutes left.

He won two Portuguese league titles and two cups with Porto before moving to Lazio for 10 million dollars where he became a key member of their 1998/99 European Cup Winners Cup victory.

He made his international debut five months after Euro 96 in England, but such is Portugal's strength in attacking midfield, Conceicao has since struggled to be a first-choice player.

Amazingly, Coelho said Conceicao was not certain to play against Turkey in their quarter-final in Amsterdam on Saturday, presumably because Barcelona star Luis Figo is a similar type of player.

"Sergio like all the others, has the right to try and get into the team. We do not know what will happen in the next match. I will decide in the next few days whether Sergio will or will not play," Coelho said in the post-match press conference.

When asked whether it was a problem having two similar players, Coelho added: "This is not a problem. The problem would be if I did not have Conceicao or Figo in my team. Both of those players are ready to play."

## Media in mourning

LONDON, June 21: Dejected, despairing and disbelieving, England was a country in mourning after its football team was sent packing from Euro 2000 following a 3-2 defeat by Romania, reports AFP.

"And it all ends in tears," headlined the Mirror daily on its front page, against a picture of an emotional England captain Alan Shearer.

Inside, it succinctly summed up the England team's performance: "Dud, sweat and tears."

And up and down the country, thousands of people who had gathered in town squares or the habitual bars to watch the match all felt the same.

"It's like a morgue," said Cathry Gracey, who runs a bar in Huddersfield, northern England, afterwards.

There was widespread agreement that England did not deserve to win because they were technically inferior, unable to hold the ball and string more than two passes together.

"England were outplayed, out-maneuvered and almost completely out-thought by a side who always looked superior," was the Sun's considered comment.

"They were found wanting in almost every area of the pitch," and hard work and spirit did not make up for the yawning gap.

"It was a disastrous end to a disastrous tournament for English football, after mindless thugs had dragged our name through the mud with their violence on the Belgian streets at the weekend," the Sun added.

"Over and out," lamented the Daily Mail.

"Careless to the last, how England self-destructed."

The Daily Telegraph wrote of the "desperately disappointing circumstances" of the defeat, Romania scoring a penalty two minutes from time.

The Guardian was more analytical.

"In terms of attacking football, they were played off the park," it said. England's two goals were lucky, but after that "they had no more luck because, in truth, they did not deserve it."

The Times thought the demise of England and Germany was emblematic.

The European championship is sweeping the old order away and casting some of the leading footballing powers into the wilderness of mediocrity."



HAIL CONCEICAO: Portugal's Sergio Conceicao exults after completing his hat-trick against Germany at Rotterdam on June 20. — AFP photo

## Conceicao brings down German Empire

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, June 21: A Sergio Conceicao hat-trick earned Portugal an emphatic 3-0 victory over Germany here on Tuesday despite fielding their second string having already qualified for the 2000 quarter-finals.

Conceicao, substitute against both Romania and England for Joao Pinto, scored in the 35th, 54th and 71st minutes to bring his side a 100 percent record from group A and send home the defending champions.

Portugal had already been assured a quarter-final meeting with Turkey in Amsterdam and made nine changes with only Jorge Costa and Fernando Couto keeping their places.

Romania's 3-2 victory over England meant they take second spot in the group and meet Italy in Brussels in Saturday's other quarter-final.

But for Germany now the inquiry begins with coach Erich Ribbeck set to stand down and the once-mighty footballing power now in no doubt that a decline has now turned into a crisis.

But the coach was dignified in defeat in what is almost certainly his last match in charge.

"It was so painful to watch. Once we got behind nothing worked for us. Portugal led us a merry dance because some of our players just did not fight," Ribbeck said.

It's a shame for the team and especially for Lothar Matthaeus, who was playing his last international match and who certainly would have liked it to have finished differently.

"I am just as much to blame and I clearly said that if we went out in the group stages that would probably mean that I will stand down," he said.

When I assumed this post two years ago, I had two objectives: First to qualify for Euro 2000 and second to have a successful tournament, meaning at least to survive the first phase. I admit I failed."

Romanians rejoice

BUCHAREST, June 21: Thirty-one people were injured during a night of wild celebrations in the Romanian capital Tuesday after their team's stunning Euro 2000 quarter-final qualification against England, reports AFP.

The Romanian capital came to a standstill when tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets for jubilant celebrations during which seven people were seriously injured and a further 24 treated for minor injuries.

Meanwhile police blocked off access to the British Embassy in Bucharest after fans descended on mass on the building to drive home their joy at their 3-2 victory.

"We've beaten them without Hagi, for Hagi," screamed a fan. "We're going to make a meal of Italy," said another.

"Thank you Portugal, thank you Portugal," chanted others referring to the Portuguese 3-0 victory against Germany which facilitated the Romanian qualification.

Already fifteen minutes before the final whistle the central University Square - the principle meeting place during mass demonstrations against the country's communist dictatorship in December 1989 - was blocked by thousands of supporters.

Romania, without suspended playmaker George Hagi, turned the tables on England after undeservedly trailing 2-1 at the start of the second half.

Cristian Chivu had opened the scoring in the 22nd minute, during the night notably the destruction of telephone boxes and smashing of shop windows.

Meanwhile Romanian president Emil Constantinescu announced Wednesday that he

## Shearer sticks to his guns

SPA, Belgium, June 21: England skipper Alan Shearer on Wednesday said he would stick by his decision to retire from international football, reports AFP.

Speaking at a news conference the day after he led England to a 2-3 defeat at the hands of Romania, ending his Euro 2000 hopes, Shearer confirmed it had been his last game for his country.

"I have made my decision and I will stick by it," he said.

"I never dreamed it would end as empty as it did last night, but it has and life just has to go on," said the Newcastle striker who scored England's opener from the penalty spot, his 30th for the national side.

Shearer again stressed the reason he's quitting international action is for family reasons, not because of media criticism.

He continued: "I wish to see more of my family and to stay the best for as long as I'm playing."

"To do that I'll need more rest. Not playing in the summer will give me more time to recover."

"If I was to carry on doing both playing domestic and international football injuries might take their toll. I want to control it before it happens."

On the tournament itself, the 29-year-old said: "We have to take responsibility for what has happened. Yes, there have been mistakes. We could have done better at certain things."

"We got the result we wanted against Germany but we didn't play well. The players are there - it's just getting them to perform."

"We had a job to do and we didn't do it. We weren't good enough. We don't have anyone else to blame."

## Keegan as keen as ever

SPA, Belgium, June 21: Kevin Keegan pledged on Wednesday to stay on as England coach here.

Worrying for Portugal coach Humberto Coelho, Pauleta had to go off on a stretcher midway through the second half and was replaced by Nuno Gomes.

Kirchner missed a point blank header from a Rink cross from the left in what would have been his first touch and Hassler had a curling shot saved as Germany pushed forward.

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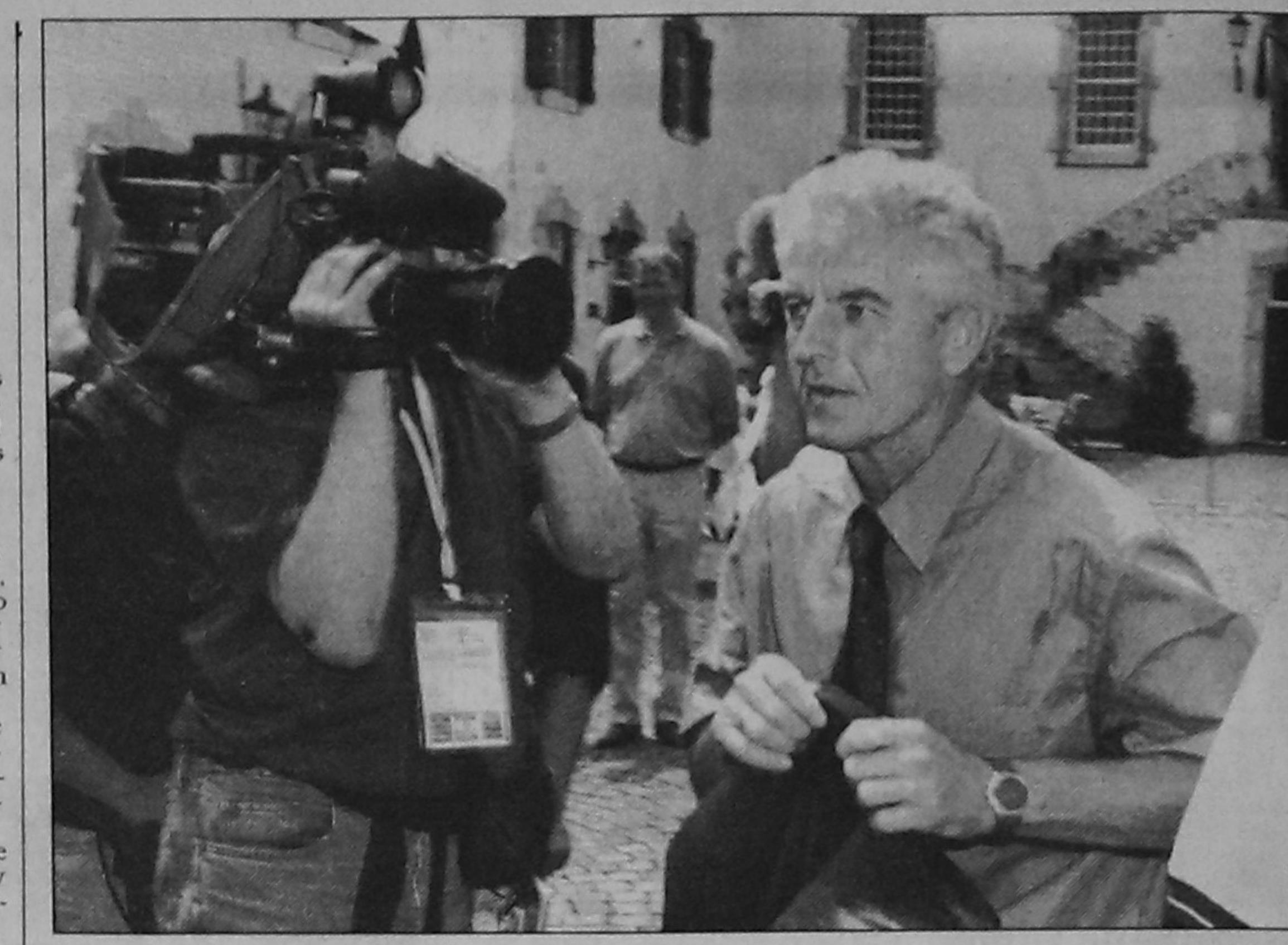
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NO POINT IN STAYING : Erich Ribbeck, the German national team coach, leaving after announcing his resignation at a press conference at Vaals yesterday. — AFP photo

## Ribbeck bids farewell

VAALS, Netherlands, June 21: Erich Ribbeck stood down as German coach Wednesday following his side's dismal performance in the Euro 2000 finals, reports AFP.

The 63-year-old Ribbeck said he had decided not to renew his contract with the German Football Federation (DFB) which came to a term with the end of their participation in Euro 2000.

Ribbeck has the distinction of being the first post-war German coach not to win either the World Cup or European title in this the DFB's centenary year.

Ribbeck told a news conference on Wednesday: "After returning during the night, I had a talk with Gerhard Mayer-Vorfelder (head of the German delegation) and DFB vice-president" and this morning I had a telephone conversation with Egil Brahm (DFB president) to tell him I am resigning with immediate effect."

His side was sent crashing with a 0-3 defeat Tuesday to a second-string Portugal side. Germany also lost 0-1 to England and drew 1-1 with Roma-

nia.

Ribbeck was named on September 9 1998 as the successor of Berti Vogts. He only lasted 22 months in the job, the shortest time ever for a coach of the Mannschaft.

The nomination of Ribbeck was seen by many as a stop-gap measure following the refusal of more illustrious names to take over the post.

Jupp Heynckes, sacked as Madrid coach after leading them to the 1998 European Cup title, went to Benfica. Both Franz Beckenbauer, the only person to skipper and coach teams to World Cup wins, and Paul Breitner, world champion in 1974, did not want the job.

The former Kaiserslautern, Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen coach had initially been assisted by former international Uli Stielike, but Horst Hrubesch took over the role several weeks before Euro 2000.

Nicknamed Sir Erich, because of his dignified bearing, Ribbeck had been assistant to Jupp Derwall who was in charge from 1978 to 1984, but then re-

signed, believing he was, in his own words, over qualified to just inflate footballs.

When asked whether he would retire in the post-match conference on Tuesday, Ribbeck had said: "When I assumed this post two years ago, I had two objectives: First to qualify for Euro 2000 and second to have a successful tournament, meaning at least to survive the first phase. I admit I have failed."

This was the first time that Germany have not been among the top eight nations of this competition since 1968 when both East and West Germany flopped.

He had also been fiercely criticized in the German press for what it believed was Ribbeck's blind loyalty in continuing with legend Lothar Matthaeus following a poor opening game against Romania.

His only major title as a coach is winning the UEFA Cup with Bayer Leverkusen in 1988.

His epithet as German coach reads a direct qualification for Euro 2000 and a mediocre record of 10 victories, 6 draws and eight defeats.

## STANDINGS

BRUSSELS, June 21: Euro 2000 tables after Monday's final Group A matches:

(Played, won, drawn, lost, for, against, points)

### Group A

Portugal 3 3 0 0 7 2 9

Romania 3 1 1 0 4 4 4

England 3 1 0 2 5 6 3</p