



EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



BEFORE AND AFTER THE DISASTER: Spanish forward Raul taking the spot-kick (L) and in despair after failing to convert that in their quarterfinal clash of the Euro 2000 against France in Bruges on June 25. — AFP photo

Raul goes on with reality

BRUGES, Belgium, June 26: Spain striker Raul was not keen to dwell on his penalty miss that cost his side a possible place in the Euro 2000 semi-finals Sunday, reports AFP.

Raul blazed his spot-kick over in the dying seconds after France goalkeeper Fabien Barthez had been penalised for fouling Abelardo.

That ensured that France prevailed 2-1 in this quarter-final with first-half goals from Zinedine Zidane and Youri Djorkaeff sandwiching another Spanish penalty, this time successful, from Gaizka Mendietta.

Raul briefly emerged in front of the waiting press pack after undergoing a random dope test but would only say: "We are going to the airport, tigers."

He was supported by coach Jose Antonio Camacho, who mused: "Raul accepts the blame. That's the mark of a great player... I'm not going to hold it against him. These things happen in football, there's no point crying about it."

Camacho added: "The French players just have this something extra which makes the difference, that's why they're the world champions."

And he then echoed Raul by saying: "We came here to win this competition and we lost... it's time to go on holiday."

Raul's Real Madrid teammate Michel Salgado said: "As for Raul there is nothing I can say, he is one of the best players in the world, the only player who misses a penalty is the one who is prepared to take it, he was brave... but to do it in the last minute. It is a missed opportunity."

GOALSCORERS

ROTTERDAM, June 26 (Reuters): Scores at Euro 2000, revised after UEFA's decision today to take away Patrick Kluivert's third goal for the Netherlands against Yugoslavia on Sunday, officially ruling it an own goal:

5 — Patrick Kluivert (Netherlands), Savo Milosevic (Yugoslavia).

3 — Sergio Conceicao (Portugal), Nuno Gomes (Portugal), Zlatko Zahovic (Slovenia).

2 — Thierry Henry (France), Youri Djorkaeff (France), Filippo Inzaghi (Italy), Francesco Totti (Italy), Frank de Boer (Netherlands), Marc Overmars (Netherlands), Boudewijn Zenden (Netherlands), Vladimir Smicer (Czech Republic), Alan Shearer (England), Alfonso (Spain), Gaizka Mendietta (Spain), Hakan Sukur (Turkey).

1 — Laurent Blanc (France), Sylvain Wiltord (France), Christophe Dugary (France), David Trezeguet (France), Zinedine Zidane (France), Antonio Conte (Italy), Stefano Fiore (Italy), Luigi Di Biagio (Italy), Alessandro Del Piero (Italy), Ronald De Boer (Netherlands), Luis Figo (Portugal), Joao Pinto (Portugal), Costinha (Portugal), Bart Goor (Belgium), Emile Mpenza (Belgium), Karel Poborsky (Czech Republic), Paul Scholes (England), Steve McManaman (England), Michael Owen (England), Mehmet Scholl (Germany), Steffen Iversen (Norway), Cristian Chivu (Romania), Dorinel Munteanu (Romania), Ioan Ganeva (Romania), Viorel Moldovan (Romania), Miran Pavlin (Slovenia), Raul (Spain), Joseba Etxeberria (Spain), Pedro Muniz (Spain), Johan Mjallby (Sweden), Henrik Larsson (Sweden), Okan Buruk (Turkey), Ljubinko Drulovic (Yugoslavia), Dejan Govedarica (Yugoslavia), Slobodan Komljenovic (Yugoslavia).

Bookies still favour France

LONDON, June 26 (AFP): France are now 6-4 favourites to win Euro 2000 with British bookies William Hill following their exciting 2-1 win over Spain in Sunday's quarter-finals.

Kluivert comes of age

ROTTERDAM, Netherlands, June 26: Holland goal machine Patrick Kluivert clinically destroyed Yugoslavia with a hat-trick in a 6-1 thrashing of Yugoslavia to reach the Euro2000 semi-finals.

The Barcelona star, who celebrates his 24th birthday on Saturday, has always been heralded as one of the great striking talents in football, but high-profile controversy has always threatened to derail his career.

Sunday's night match, in which he scored in the 24th, 38th and 54th minutes saw him finally come good with a goal spree when it mattered against one of Europe's top sides.

Kluivert said in the post-match conference on his official-man-of-the-match award: "I think this prize is what I deserved together with the players for my team. Without these players I would not have this prize."

Yugoslav midfielder Dejan Govedarica however appeared to deflect home what would have been another goal in the 51st minute after a Paul Bosvelt cross but Kluivert confirmed: "I only scored three goals. I am honest."

Kluivert scored the second hat-trick of the tournament after Sergio Conceicao's treble against Germany for Portugal in their final group match.

In previous tournaments Holland's Marco van Basten (1988), France's Michel Platini (twice in 1984), Germany's Dieter Muller (1976) and Klaus

Allofs (1980) have scored trebles.

Kluivert has also scored 28 goals in 44 appearances, since making his international debut in a 0-0 draw with Czech Republic in November 1994, and is the Euro 2000 joint top scorer with five.

Goals by Marc Overmars in the 78th and 90th minutes completed the scoring for the hosts in front of 51,000 ecstatic fans before Savo Milosevic grabbed a late consolation, also his fifth of the tournament, for Yugoslavia.

Holland would return to Rotterdam for the July 2 final should they beat Italy at the Amsterdam Arena on Thursday in the second semi-final.

Kluivert's temper can boil over, as is the case with many top footballers as the fury is a by-product of the natural aggression which makes them stars.

However he knows he cannot repeat the antics which earned a red card at the 1998 World Cup.

Kluivert was dismissed in a group match against Belgium for retaliation, by hitting Belgium's Lorenzo Staelens, and served a two-match ban which was just the result their opponents would have wanted.

But he went on to become one of their key players and scored the equalizer in the 87th minute for 1-1 draw in the semi-final against Brazil, which they eventually lost on penalties.

He also had a five-match ban slapped on him by the Spanish football federation in January after striking Rayo Vallecano player Jesus Diego Coto a month earlier.

The player was handed a four-match ban but also missed a fifth game because of a sanction that had been suspended following a previous brush with authority.

The Dutch star also had a traumatic time after scoring the winner in Ajax's 1-0 European Cup win over AC Milan in 1995.

Written off after a near-disastrous season with AC Milan, Kluivert had been struggling to cope with his form and a protracted rape case brought against him in Amsterdam in June 1997.

However, the case was thrown out in February 1998 for lack of evidence and in August of that year, the Dutchman received some 20,000 dollars in compensation.

In September 1995, Kluivert's car crashed into another vehicle, causing the death of one of Holland's top theatre directors.

He was later convicted of the accidental killing, and sentenced to 240 hours of community service, with a three-month suspended jail sentence.

With all that strife behind him, Kluivert has now produced a superb display of finishing to see him blossom at Euro 2000, and finally confirm the potential that no one doubted.

Maldini on familiar ground

GEEL, Belgium, June 26: Italy captain Paolo Maldini will be facing his own past in Thursday's semi-final against Holland, pitting his wits against former AC Milan teammates Patrick Kluivert and Frank Rijkaard, reports AFP.

Maldini, who is hopeful of overcoming a thigh strain picked up last Saturday, was playing alongside Rijkaard, now the Holland coach, in Arrigo Sacchi's great Milan side of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

And he also watched Kluivert as the former star of Ajax Amsterdam battled in vain to make it in Italian football, admitting defeat after little more than one season and joining Barcelona in 1998.

Kluivert's hat-trick in their 6-1 demolition of Yugoslavia on Sunday has made him the talk of the tournament - and a sharp contrast with his flop in Milan.

"He always had the talent," Maldini said at Italy's training base here Monday.

"But during the two years from 1996 to 1998, nobody at AC Milan particularly distinguished themselves and, unfortunately, anyone who arrived during that period paid the price for that."

"He was a lad of 21 at the time, starting out at San Siro in a team that was used to winning and which never had the time or the patience to wait for players, because it had always had great stars."

"It certainly wasn't the ideal conditions for a new player to succeed."

However, Maldini underlined that Kluivert's scoring ability here is also down to the support of Dennis Bergkamp, Marc Overmars and Boudewijn Zenden.

"He's a finisher, but he's in a team that very work hard behind him," Maldini said. "I watched them last night and they went for goal 15 times during the first half between shots on target and shots wide."

"This is a team who play well and who have certainly improved. They didn't play like this at the start (of the tournament)."

Rijkaard, who conjured up a memorable performance from his men, will now draw on his career as an AC Milan defender when deciding his tactics for

the Italy match.

"Rijkaard knows Italian football and therefore knows the difficulties that we might face and where we might have weaknesses, in his opinion," Maldini said. "We certainly don't have many secrets from him."

On a personal level, he added: "It seems strange to see him as a coach, because as a player he was already very reserved. He liked playing, and that was it."

Maldini is confident that Italy's traditional ability to soak up pressure and keep a tight defence could unnervingly Dutch in Amsterdam.

"We've got to stop Bergkamp, to stop Kluivert, to stop Overmars...", Maldini said, trailing off. "We've just got to be careful, but then Italy are masters at that, at not giving opposing at-

tackers any space.

"If we are always there and we never leave them alone, even a team who are in great shape and playing great football might make lose their cool."

And he pointed out: "Yesterday they played with only two real defenders, they're a side who attack a lot. But that means taking risks - and Italy have the players who can exploit that."

As for Italy's chances, he said: "They're 50-50, and that goes for the other semi-final as well."

Maldini, whose presence at the start of training prompted a rendition of 'Happy Birthday' from a crowd of 200 here as he turned 32, was optimistic about his own chances on Thursday.

But he added: "We'll see how things go tomorrow when I start running and doing things."

Asked about the Dutch, he told reporters after training here on Monday: "They're a great side. Scoring six goals in a quarter-final isn't easy."

"They've got four or five players who can turn a match any moment - it's going to be very difficult."

But he went on: "Watching their matches, they leave a lot of free space and we're always able to create four or five scoring chances. We'll just have to make the most of them."

"We know that they are a formidable side up front. But

we have a defence like we've got, it's going to be a bit difficult for them."

Though the home crowd at the Amsterdam Arena are hoping to see plenty of goals, many suspect that Thursday's match could be a fairly dour affair with Italy hunkering down in defence and waiting to strike on the break.

"It's only to be expected that people want to see a lot of goals," said Totti. "But we just want to win. That's all there is to it."

The sheer scale of Yugoslavia's defeat was meanwhile due in large part to some woeful performances in defence - the very department where Italy are strongest.

"It will be a completely different match," Totti assured reporters. "They're physically in good shape, they're playing at home and all the rest - but the fact is they'll be facing an opponent who can cause them trouble."

And he summed up: "We've a competitive side and we can win these European championships. All we have to think about now is getting into the final."

Italy will need another rock solid performance at the back to achieve that and Dino Zoff's defenders are already well

Conte blames Hagi

GEEL, Belgium, June 26: Italy midfielder Antonio Conte accused Romania's Gheorghe Hagi on Monday of trying to break his leg in the crunching tackle which ended the Juventus skipper's appearance at Euro 2000, reports AFP.

Hagi was only booked for the offence during Saturday night's quarter-final in Brussels, which Italy won 2-1. The 35-year-old playmaker, Romania's greatest footballer ever, was later sent off for a dive in the penalty area in a vain bid to win a penalty.

Hagi was subsequently banned for a match by UEFA but the penalty is academic as Hagi has said he will retire from international football.

But the damage to Conte's ankle ligaments will keep the Italian out of action for several weeks, and possibly even delay his appointment with Juventus' pre-season training.

Conte, who is staying on with the squad in the Low Countries, made it clear at Italy's training base here on Monday that he believed there was malicious intent.

"Anyone who plays professional football knows how easy it is to break an opponent's leg," he said. "In that moment, I saw it was premeditated. I've no doubt that it was a foul designed to break my leg."

Euphoric press

THE HAGUE, June 26: The Dutch press was united Monday in hailing the performance of their national team, the 'Oranje', in routing Yugoslavia 6-1 in Sunday's Euro 2000 quarter-final, and in particular Patrick Kluivert, reports AFP.

"Oranje, what a performance!" was the front page headline in the Telegraaf. "Kluivert, man of the match with four, no three goals!" said the left-leaning Volkskrant, a reference to the fact that the third of Kluivert's four goals was expected to be classed as an own goal.

For the Telegraaf Holland "gave Yugoslavia a lesson in football," observing that "for the first time they showed the mark of a real champion."

The paper added: "Oranje gave the Dutch fans in Rotterdam one of the finest matches ever played by an international side."

It was a similar theme across at the conservative Algemeen Dagblad.

"Ovation for Oranje" the paper gushed, going on: "In an astounding display the 11 Dutch players were undeniably carrying the look of European champions, they've reached the point of no-return."

The Trouw saw in the performance "the signs of a strong and homogeneous team" and the paper drew a comparison with the Dutch side which after a poor start matured to lift the 1988 European championships.

"After a languid start the team has become strong... with exploding stars like Kluivert, Davids and Bergkamp."

The Volkskrant dwelt on Kluivert's goal tally, officially given as four by Spanish referee Garcia-Aranda but according to the player himself one of those was an own goal by Dejan Govedarica.

The paper quoted Kluivert as saying: "I know that I didn't score this goal. But if everyone says that I did, and if the referee has given it to me, then why not!"

UEFA ruled on Monday that in fact it was an own goal leaving Kluivert with a hat-trick.

In conclusion the Volkskrant wrote that "the joy (of Kluivert) sits well with this incredible night in Rotterdam during which the Netherlands achieved a record result with Kluivert earning all the superlatives possible."



22 TOP: Inspirational French playmaker Zinedine Zidane (2nd from L) is the toast of his teammates after conjuring a magical free-kick against Spain in Bruges on June 25. — AFP photo

Zidane puts it down to class

BRUGES, Belgium, June 26: Zinedine Zidane set France on their way to a place in the Euro 2000 semi-finals here on Sunday night and then said that quality football was the key to his side's success.

The world champions beat Spain 2-1 after Zidane opened the scoring with a spectacular free-kick and Youri Djorkaeff powered in the winner after Gaizka Mendietta had briefly levelled for Spain from the penalty spot.

France, inspired by Zidane, were playing the fluid, skilful game which established them as favourites to win Euro 2000 before a ball was even kicked.

Spain put up plenty of resistance, particularly in the closing minutes - when Real Madrid star Raul skied a last-gasp penalty over the bar, but they were always a notch below Roger Lemerre's side.

Zidane said: "It was a great game and a wonderful win, even if we had to suffer right to the very end - and despite conceding a penalty which could have changed everything."

"Fortunately for us, he missed it."

But the former World Player of the Year went on: "We played real quality football - 90 minutes of the top-level. But I think the Spanish also showed what they can do."

Spain had a haphazard route to the last eight, losing 1-0 to Norway in their opener, edging minnows Slovenia 2-1 and then snatching an amazing 4-3 win over Yugoslavia with two goals in injury-time.

"Looking at Spain's first three matches, people might have thought that this would have been an easy match," said the number 10.

"But it was completely the opposite. They're perhaps on the same top level as France and it made it for a great match."

"But looking at the game overall, you have to say that France deserved to win."

Zidane has scored from free-kicks on many occasions for Juventus in the Serie A and also in the European Champions League - as even Manchester United have found out to their cost in the past.

But he revealed: "I don't think I've scored from a free-kick (for France). So I'm even happier to have managed it here tonight, because it's something that I like doing."

Matchwinner Djorkaeff pointed to the physical sacrifice

which the team had made to reach the last four.

"We've really emptied ourselves, it's hard to even talk," he said. "It's going to take a bit of time to recover from this and we've got another match on Wednesday."

"But what a great win - and what a pleasure it is to play in matches like that."

As for the goal, he said: "I managed to control the pass just right, so it meant I didn't have to break my stride or slow up. Then, with the confidence I've got at the moment, I just hit a shot and it went straight under the crossbar."

"It's made me really happy."

The penalty aside, Spain kept threatening the French goal right through to the very end, pushing Lemerre's men to the limit.

Djorkaeff said: "We were fairly surprised because it's been a long time since an opponent posed such problems on a physical level."

"We're usually very strong anyway in the final quarter of an hour but they were even stronger - in the 95th minute they were still fighting."

"But the big satisfaction for us at the end was that we didn't let things slip."

Old is always gold

KNOCKE, Belgium, June 26 (AFP): Much has been made at Euro 2000 of the new-look France with the pace and power of its young strikers, but it was the old World Cup winning guard which counted in the thriller against Spain.

Roger Lemerre's men had to dig deep to outlast the feisty Spaniards 2-1 in Sunday's hard-fought Bruges quarter-final and the score-sheet looked familiar.

No Thierry Henry, no Nicolas Anelka, no David Trezeguet, just World Cup heroes Zinedine Zidane with a curling free-kick after 33 minutes and Youri Djorkaeff with a typically opportunistic blast one minute from the break.

France strolled through their three group games to get to the quarter-finals with Arsenal's Henry picking up man-of-the-match awards on the two occasions he played.

But in the clutch against Spain, he was largely found wanting and Real Madrid's Anelka was left on the bench as

Lemerre preferred the less gifted but supremely combative Christophe Dugary, another of the World Cup veterans.

The Bordeaux player was the epitome of French courage breaking his nose in an early clash of heads in the Spanish box but returning to action with cotton wool swabs protruding from his bloody nostrils.

Dugary was banged around even more by the gritty Spanish defence, but he continued to pose problems with his feints and thrusts, finishing the match exhausted.

He even set up a golden opportunity for his old friend and provider Zidane in the 29th minute but the Juventus player uncharacteristically completely missed the ball with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Captain Didier Deschamps, widely criticised in the French press for being over the hill and lacking in creativity was also back to his best pushing forward and creating chances alongside Zidane.

And then there was the famous French back four of Lilian Thuram, Laurent Blanc, Marcel Desailly and Bixente Lizarazu.

It may not have been the finest match they have played together as a unit since their first match in Newcastle during Euro 1996, but all that a potent Spanish attack could muster after 90 minutes was a penalty-kick goal.

It's beginning to look familiar. From the start of the tournament, the French first choice back four in front of Manchester United-bound goalkeeper Fabien Barthez have conceded just two goals - both from the penalty spot.

Two years ago in France the same five completed the World Cup finals with just two goals against, one from the penalty spot.

The French now turn to a semi-final tie against Portugal in Brussels on Wednesday just two matches away from being the first side to win the World Cup and then go on to with the European title.

Totti's message to the 'Flying Dutchmen'

GEEL, Belgium, June 26: Francesco Totti paid tribute on Monday to Holland for their 6-1 demolition of Yugoslavia at Euro 2000 - but then warned them that they are in for a very different time against Italy, reports AFP.

The two sides meet in Amsterdam on Thursday for a place in the final, with the Dutch starting as favourites after their handsome quarter-final win, their all-attacking football and their stirring support from an orange-coloured crowd.

However, Totti believes that Italy's combination of patient defending and clinical finishing can bring them a fifth consecutive win at these championships.

Asked about the Dutch, he told reporters after training here on Monday: "They're a great side. Scoring six goals in a quarter-final isn't easy."

"They've got four or five players who can turn a match any moment - it's going to be very difficult."

But he went on: "Watching their matches, they leave a lot of free space and we're always able to create four or five scoring chances. We'll just have to make the most of them."

"We know that they are a formidable side up front. But

warmed.

Juventus' Mark Iuliano, who is expected to play on Thursday despite missing training with a painful calf, was also impressed by the Dutch win over Yugoslavia.

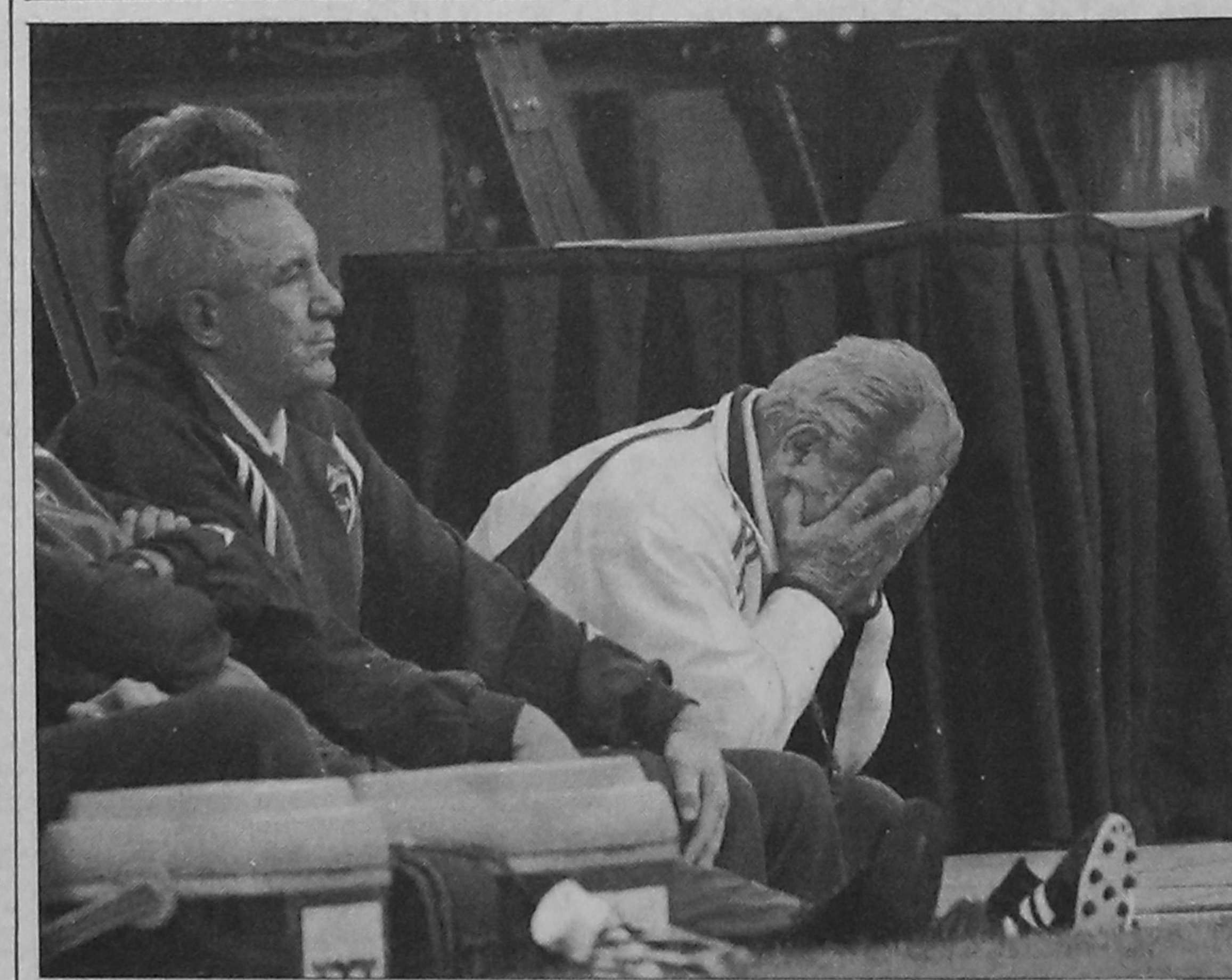
"It really made a big impression," he said. "But we already knew that it would be enormously difficult if we ever came up against Holland."

And he paid tribute to club teammate Edgar Davids, recently panned by Dutch legend Johan Cruyff, saying: "I'm really pleased for Davids, because despite all the criticism he's proving that he's one of the best midfielders there is."

And he added: "They're all great players... so we've got to be very careful. We've got to watch them closely and be ready to hit them on the break."

Protest promptly stopped

BRUGES, Belgium, June 26: A solitary protester was wrenched to the ground Sunday as the French and Spanish teams lined up for the national anthems ahead of the Euro 2000 quarter-final match between the two teams, reports AFP.



DISTRAUGHT: Yugoslav national coach Vujadin Boskov covers his face after watching his team suffer a 6-1 humiliation against Holland in their Euro 2000 quarter-final on June 25. — AFP photo