



# EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



## Popescu may follow his skipper

BUCHAREST, June 27: Sweeper Gheorghe Popescu said Tuesday that he was considering following illustrious Galatasaray and Romania colleague Gheorghe Hagi into retirement from the international stage after his country's 2-0 elimination in the Euro 2000 quarter-finals by Italy, reports AFP.

"I have not yet decided. I don't know if I am going to continue for the 2002 World Cup qualifiers," said the 34-year-old former Tottenham and Barcelona player.

Gica Popescu, who has prolonged his contract with his Istanbul-based club by two years, concurred with Hagi in slamming referees at Euro 2000, describing the performances of the men in black as 'hallucinating'.

## Juve rope in Trezeguet

MONACO, June 27: France's Euro 2000 striker David Trezeguet has joined Italian First Division side Juventus, his French First Division club Monaco announced Tuesday, reports AFP.

The French champions have moved quickly to replace Trezeguet, signing Burundian Congolese international striker Shabani Nonda from Rennes.

"Striker Shabani Nonda has Tuesday signed a five-year contract with AS Monaco and at the same time David Trezeguet has been transferred to the Italian club," Monaco announced in a statement Tuesday.

The principality outfit would not give details about the contract but Italian press reports have speculated that the fee is in the region of 23 million dollars while they say the player has signed a five-year contract.

## Nuno shining bright

ERMELO, Netherlands, June 27 (AFP): Nuno Gomes, Portugal's fourth-choice striker to represent Euro 2000, has shot to stardom at these championships to help his country reach the semi-final and bring further glory to the name Gomes.

Fernando Gomes, who played for Spanish side Sporting Gijon and FC Porto, was a star center forward for Portugal during the 80s.

Nuno Gomes, known as Nuno Ribeiro previously, decided to adopt the family name Gomes because of his adulation of his illustrious namesake.

Gomes, speaking at Monday's post-training conference in Ermelo, said: "Fernando Gomes was one of my favourite players because he scored so many goals. But I think I played differently to him."

"The difference is he was more of a quiet player who did not move too much. But he was always waiting in the right place at the right time for the ball."

Benfica forward Gomes, 24 on Wednesday next week, had been regarded by many as a great prospect but before Euro 2000 he had only started twice for Portugal in 13 appearances.

He had not really shown his form at international level basically because he is a fourth-choice after Joao Pinto, Ricardo Sa Pinto and Pauleta. But after scoring the winner against England for 3-2 after being 2-0 down he made his mark.

Sa Pinto's suspension and Pauleta's suspension gave Gomes his chance against England and his two goals in the 2-0 win over Turkey in the quarter-finals in Amsterdam on Saturday yet further brought him acclaim.

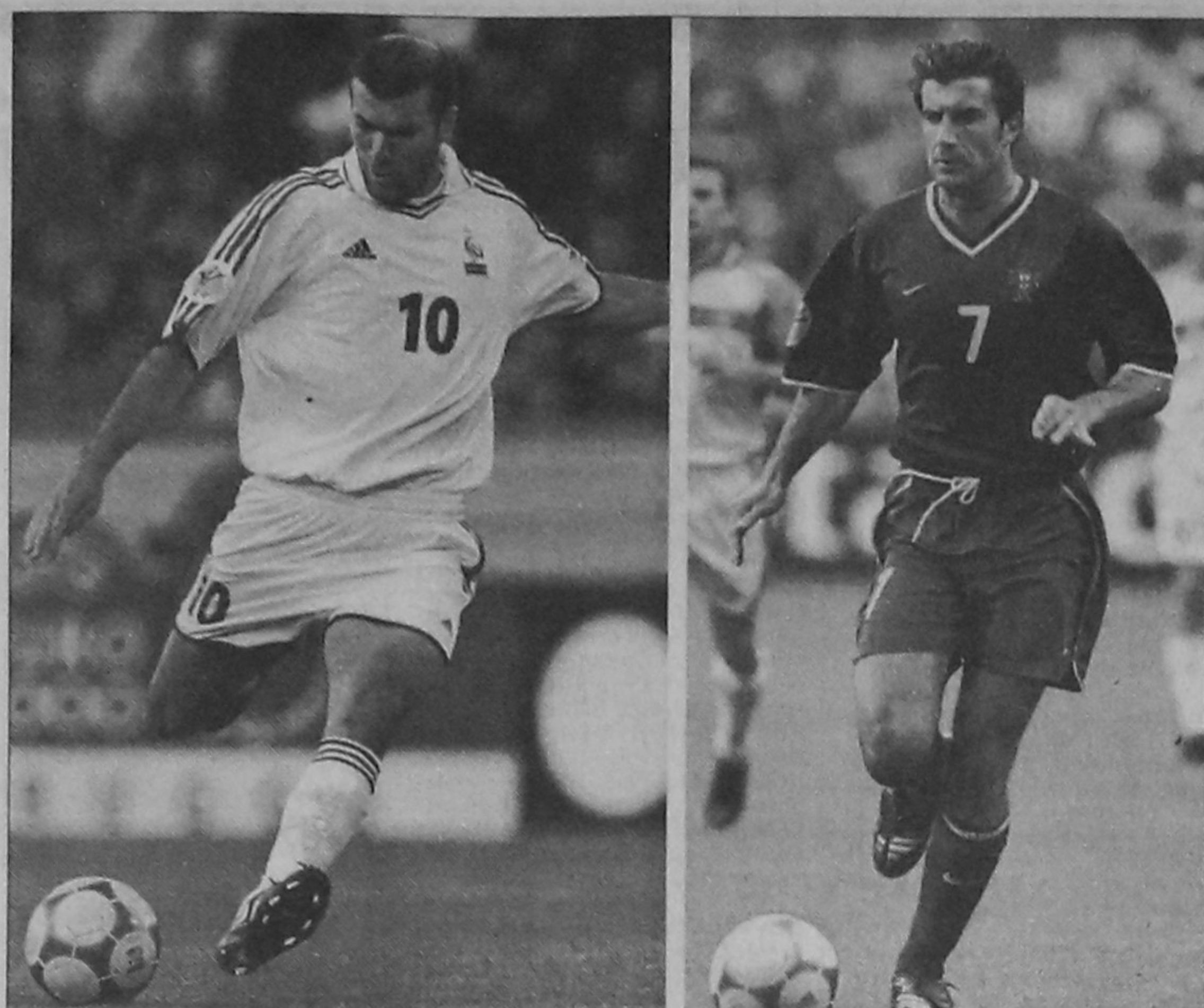
He added about playing under pressure: "I deal with pressure all the time not only in this tournament. I'm used to pressure at club level during my whole career. I have always dealt with pressure so it's no different right now."

For that under-20 world event, Portugal beat Spain in the third-place play-off - Spain had Raul, Ivan de la Pena and Joseba Etxeberria in their lineup.

The full name of Gomes is Nuno Miguel Soares Pereira Ribeiro Gomes but his name was known at that under-20 event as Nuno Ribeiro, before he changed it because of his idol.

These championships usually throw up stars previously little known. Gomes is normally in the shadow of great players such as Luis Figo of Barcelona, Rui Costa of Fiorentina and Porto keeper Victor Baia.

Perhaps at this event he will seal his international reputation with further goals to give a boost to his country who host the next finals in 2004.



WHO WILL SMILE LAST? AFP file photos of the opposing superstars of the first semifinal, France's mercurial Zinedine Zidane and the virtuoso Luis Figo of Portugal.

## Figo v Zidane: Rivalry made in heaven

BRUSSELS, June 27 (AFP): Portugal and France meet in Wednesday's Euro 2000 semi-final in Brussels with the winners due to play the victors of the other semi-final between Holland and Italy in Sunday's final at Rotterdam's De Kuip Stadium.

France will look to Zinedine Zidane to rekindle the form that helped them lift the World Cup two years ago while Luis Figo is the talisman for Portugal, who are looking to reach a major final for the first time.

**ZINEDINE ZIDANE (France)** Cannes, on France's Mediterranean coast, is famous for the annual film festival that has turned countless cinema 'wannabes' into global superstars.

But it's rather less fashionable football club is also responsible for launching one megastar of the football world into orbit.

It was at the humble French Second Division club, where he played between 1988 and 1992, that Zinedine Zidane first burst onto the football scene.

Born on June 23, 1972 in Marseille as one of five children to Algerian parents Zinedine naturally grew up as a supporter of Marseille football club with the club's Uruguayan striker Enzo Francescoli his hero.

Zidane would later name the first of his two sons Enzo.

But it was down the coast at Cannes where he was given his chance, signing on in 1988.

Zidane needed a bigger stage, however and then exchanged the red-and-white striped shirt of Cannes for the navy blue strip of Bordeaux in 1992.

It was at Bordeaux that Zidane first started to cause ripples in European, rather than just French football, and he featured in the team that reached the final of the 1996 UEFA Cup.

Two of his team-mates in that side Christophe Dugarry, his closest footballing friend, and Bixente Lizarazu went on with Zidane to feature in the France national team side that would lift the World Cup in 1998.

In 1994 Zidane was given his chance with the national team and he could hardly have made a better start, scoring both goals in a 2-2 draw with the Czech Republic.

That 1994 international bow came in the wake of France's traumatic failure to qualify for the 1994 World Cup in the United States with an injury-time goal from Emil Kostadinov in Paris seeing Bulgaria qualify at the expense of France.

It was a Spanish wife he had indicated he would like to

end his career in Spain. However, fans of the famous Catalan club disagreed with those verdicts. When the Nou Camp faithful cast their votes it was Portugal's Luis Figo that was named player of the year.

Luis Filipe Madeira Castro Figo was born on November 4, 1972 in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon.

It was Sporting Lisbon rather than their city rivals Benfica that won the race to capture the signature of Figo.

Figo was called into the national team for the first time on October 12, 1991 and played in the 1-1 draw with Luxembourg.

At the time he was just one of many talented products of the Portuguese youth system that allowed the Latin country to win the World Youth Cups in both 1989 and 1991.

He stayed with Sporting for five years winning one Portuguese Cup but it was only a matter of time before the fleet-footed Figo would move on.

Barcelona was the club that took the plunge and in 1995 Figo, then 22, made the move.

Figo's pace and dribbling skills make him a natural choice on the flanks but he is also capable of playing up front and in central midfield.

At Barcelona - in a team full of stars - he quickly overcame the prejudice that sometimes faces players of non-Catalan origin.

In 1997 he won the Spanish Cup and the European Cup Winners Cup.

The next year was even better and he pulled off a Treble of Primera Liga title, Spanish Cup and European Super Cup.

In 1999 he had to settle for the Primera Liga crown and so far this year is trophyless.

But two more good performances from Figo and his team-mates could ensure that changes by Sunday.

The resignations of Barcelona president Josep Lluís Nunez and coach Louis van Gaal have left 'King Luis' in limbo and rumours persist that he could be on the move - possibly to Lazio of Italy.

A European Championship winners-medal would certainly boost the asking price for Figo in the new regime at the Nou Camp does risk the wrath of the fans by trying to offload him.

Married to a Spanish wife he has indicated he would like to

## Their last chance to deliver?

HOENDERLOO, Netherlands, June 27: Holland's Marc Overmars admitted Tuesday that Euro 2000 might be the last chance for some of the older 'Oranje' stars to perform in a top international tournament, reports AFP.

Overmars was speaking a day after Holland coach Frank Rijkaard confirmed Monday that he wanted one of those elder statesmen Dennis Bergkamp to reconsider his decision to quit international football after this event.

Bergkamp had said before Euro 2000 that the tournament co-hosted by Holland and Belgium would be his last hurrah in the famous orange shirt.

Not least of 31-year-old Bergkamp's worries is his well-documented fear of flying - and with the 2002 World Cup to be played in Japan and South Korea it is difficult to see how the Arsenal player could play in that tournament without taking to the air.

Overmars admitted the older generation were under pressure from emerging stars in the Netherlands.

"It's difficult to say if it's their last chance. Quite a lot of people are getting over 30 or near 30 and in a few years time it will be a completely different team," said the 27-year-old Arsenal man.

"Our young players here are looking very good prospects for the future and I expect a lot of changes in the team for our next major event."

Regarding Holland's Euro 2000 hopes Overmars said: "Naturally it's pressure in your own country but you can expect that. Fans can get behind us and with the stadiums 80 percent Dutch they give you a real boost."

## Rijkaard wants Bergkamp to stay

## Holland to go for adjustments

HOENDERLOO, Netherlands, June 27: Holland coach Frank Rijkaard said here Tuesday that Holland would have to adjust their game plan against Italy in the Euro 2000 semi-final at the Amsterdam Arena on Thursday (1600 GMT), reports AFP.

Holland, who won this event in 1988 with Rijkaard a key



PATRICK KUIVERT

player in that team, would book a July 2 final date with France or Portugal in Rotterdam on Sunday should they earn victory over the fancied Italians.

Rijkaard said: "We need to work on the details of how Italian strikers play. The way an Italian challenges for the ball is different to other strikers and I need to brief my defenders."

"But the players know what they have to do in general."

Rijkaard, who as a player had a long and successful stint in Italy with AC Milan, added: "We want to play our own offensive game but the Italians have a tight defence and give very few chances and score goals at the right moments."

"These are the things we have to look at but we should not neglect the way we play. We have to dominate the game right from the start."

On Dennis Bergkamp who impressed against Yugoslavia in a playmaking role Rijkaard said: "When Bergkamp started his Euro 2000 campaign he showed a good fighting spirit and in general he always plays with great commitment."

"He really showed great form in the last couple of games. I want to play him in midfield as a player who can create his own space. He can decide for himself where he goes. He will have a free role between attack and midfield."

Rijkaard also confirmed Bergkamp to reconsider his decision to quit international football after Euro 2000.

Bergkamp had said before Euro 2000 that the tournament would be his last hurrah with the 'Oranje'.

Not least of 31-year-old Bergkamp's worries is his well-documented fear of flying - and with the 2002 World Cup to be played in Japan and South Korea it is difficult to see how the Arsenal player could play in that tournament without taking to the air.

"I think any coach would want to speak to him," said Rijkaard when asked whether he would like the former Ajax and Inter Milan star to reconsider.

After the 6-1 drubbing of Yugoslavia in the quarter-finals Rijkaard had replied for sure when asked if he would ask Bergkamp to reconsider.

Referring to Patrick Kluivert, who scored a hat-trick in the thrashing of Yugoslavia, Rijkaard continued: "We will be trying to give the ball to him at the right place at the right time."

Kluivert spoke a little about why he succeeded with Barcelona after an unsuccessful stint at AC Milan. "I agree I am playing better at Barcelona. In the Spanish league I am playing in a system which suits me, Kluivert said."

"To fit in well in a team it depends on the coach and the system. If I play in a system with three strikers, I think then

the team can benefit most from me.

"I know now that the system at AC Milan did not suit me but it was a challenge for me to try and be successful in Italy."

On Bergkamp Kluivert said: "Dennis is in great form and it's very difficult to stop him. When he's in good form he can make



DENNIS BERGKAMP

other players play better as well."

Kluivert added: "When I score goals I get more confident and I have scored quite a few right now."

He is currently the tournament's joint top scorer on five with Yugoslavia's Savo Milosevic who scored in the final seconds against Holland for a consolation goal.

On Dutch legend Johan Cruyff's criticism of the team, winger Marc Overmars said it was just something the team had to deal with.

"We have not just had criticism from Cruyff," Overmars said. "It's been from all the media the last few weeks even though we have won all our matches. They expect attractive football as well as three points."

"We only really managed both in our last game against Yugoslavia."

## Matthaeus reveals coup bid against Ribbeck



LOTHAR MATTHAEUS

BERLIN, June 27: German international libero Lothar Matthaeus Monday confirmed reports that certain of his Euro 2000 team-mates had tried to install him as coach of the national team instead of Erich Ribbeck just before the start of Euro 2000.

The ringleaders of the plot were Dietmar Hamann, Jens Jeremies and Markus Babel, according to Matthaeus, and the plotting came to a head at a pre-Euro 2000 training camp at Majorca, Spain.

"Hamann, Jeremies, Babel and several others came to see me during the Majorca camp and said to me 'you should do it, you would do a lot better,'" Matthaeus told German TV channel SF.

The revelations by Matthaeus, holder of a world record 15 caps, confirm reports in Monday's Kicker magazine that such a plot existed.

The thinking behind the plot, according to Kicker, was to kill two birds by one stone - get rid of Ribbeck and enforce Matthaeus to renounce his playing role.

Matthaeus, presumably hurt by the implied slight on his playing ability, claims to have replied: "How can you imagine doing that? I have no experience. And I want to play myself which I could not do as coach. Anyway you can't just 'kill' a coach like this just before Euro."

Ribbeck resigned after Germany's disastrous defence of their title ended with defeats by England and Portugal and a solitary draw with Romania in Group A.

## Frisk referee for Final

BRUSSELS, June 27: Swedish referee Anders Frisk will officiate at Sunday's Euro 2000 Final at Rotterdam's De Kuip Stadium, UEFA announced Monday, reports AFP.

He will be assisted by compatriot Leif Lindberg and Denmark's Jens Larsen.

Austria's Gunter Benko will handle the semi-final between France and Portugal on Wednesday at Brussels while Germany's Markus Merk takes charge of the Holland v Italy semi-final at the Amsterdam Arena on Thursday.

## Century beckons Deschamps

BRUSSELS, June 27: Didier Deschamps is set to become the first French player to win 100 international caps on Wednesday when France do battle with Portugal here in a Euro 2000 semi-final, reports AFP.

Deschamps has long since passed Manuel Amoros' previous record of 82 caps in the famous Blue shirt and in terms of medals won is the most successful French footballer in history but the signs are growing that this Napoleonic figure might be about to face his Waterloo.

The threat to Deschamps does not necessarily come from the Portuguese troops being marshalled at nearby Waterloo by coach Humberto Coelho.

A more pressing concern for the ageing Basque, like Napoleon diminutive in stature but reputedly with a say in all matters concerning France (or at least its football team), is the emergence of Patrick Vieira during Euro 2000.

An injury to Emmanuel Petit ensured that coach Roger Lemerre was not forced to choose between Deschamps and the Senegal-born Vieira for the 2-1 quarter-final victory over Spain.

But Deschamps has now retreated behind a wall of silence, still apparently sulking at the question of a journalist who asked him if he felt threatened by a possible Petit-Vieira axis.

Deschamps has carried all before him on the battlefield of international football having lifted the World Cup with France, won the European Cup with Marseille and Juventus and having won several national titles with both those clubs. He recently added an FA Cup winners medal with Chelsea to that collection.

And rumours persist that both under Lemerre and his World Cup winning predecessor Aime Jacquet Deschamps had an influential voice in team selection.

Deschamps denies that it is

he who persuaded Jacquet to ditch Eric Cantona and David Ginola from the national team - although Ginola has publicly accused Deschamps of being the author of his fall from favour.

"People are crediting me with a power that I do not have," Deschamps said before beginning his media sulk. "Sometimes I have discussed technique or tactics (with the coach) but I have never influenced the choice of players."

His denials have not been helped by some of his previous utterings.

When asked if one day he would like to coach France Deschamps



DIDIER DESCHAMPS

said: "I have been (coach) for five years."

He quickly added that he was only joking but rumours resurfaced during France's Euro 2000 qualifying campaign that he was interfering this time with Lemerre's selection.

At France's Clairefontaine base Deschamps is the only player whose room has a balcony but despite these trappings of power the signs are there that the younger players - those like Vieira, Thierry Henry, Johan Micoud and Nicolas Anelka are beginning to form their own power base as the old guard be-

gins to look increasingly battle weary.

Meanwhile, Deschamps long-time comrade-in-arms Laurent Blanc has already announced he will quit after Euro 2000.

Blanc, like Deschamps a figure whose influence can be measured by the fact that he is known as 'the President' in the French dressing room, is one of Deschamps' closest lieutenants and the doubts persist about how long his other confidant Marcel Desailly can continue at top level.

Desailly, in fact, is more than a confidant for Deschamps.

The two, both 31, began together in the Nantes youth team and also were team-mates in the star-studded Marseille outfit that led French club football to its greatest heights with the 1993 European Cup success although that success has subsequently been tarnished by the match-fixing scandal that surrounded the club's former president Bernard Tapie.

They both moved on to Italy - Desailly to AC Milan and Deschamps to Juventus - but are currently reunited at English Premiership side Chelsea.

Before his stand-off with the media Deschamps said he hoped to lead France's defence of the World Cup in Japan and South Korea in 2002.

"I want to carry on at the top level for two or three years more," said Deschamps. "I want to carry on to the 2002 World Cup. I will reflect (after Euro 2000). I will analyse the situation honestly as I have always done."

Vieira continues his progress against Portugal than Deschamps may well have to face some home truths and while his exile may be sealed by a football boot rather than the Wellington variety it could be that Euro 2000 proved one battle too many for the emperor of the golden age of French football.

## TOURNEY TREATS

BRUSSELS, June 27: Euro 2000 diary for Tuesday, the 18th day of Euro 2000:

### KRAJICEK'S HEART WITH 'ORANJE'

WIMBLEDON, England: Dutch tennis star Richard Krajicek is contemplating a quick trip to Holland to watch his beloved 'Oranje' in Euro 2000 - even if it affects his chances at the Wimbledon tennis championships.

"We thought we went to the right place yesterday (to watch the 6-1 win over Yugoslavia) but it wasn't and we were the only people in there."

"I'm still here and we're in the final then I'll have to see about making a quick hop over the water."

semi-final with Italy and possibly Sunday's final.

"If I lose on Wednesday I'll go back home but if I win there is supposed to be a Dutch bar in Chelsea (London) that is all orange," Krajicek said Monday after winning his first-round match.

Football-loving Krajicek won the Wimbledon men's title in 1996 beating unseeded MaliVai Washington in the final. In that year he beat Pete Sampras - no-one has beaten the American at Wimbledon since.

But Krajicek is worried that Wimbledon duties will prevent him from watching Holland should they reach Thursday's

## PIRES LOSING GROUND AT HOME!

GENVA, Belgium: France midfielder Robert Pires has al-

ready broken his Spanish mother's heart by eliminating Spain at the Euro 2000 quarter-final stage.

And now the Marseille playmaker, set to join either Arsenal or Real Madrid after Euro 2000, is also risking opening up a new family feud with his father, who hails from Portugal - France's semi-final opponents in Brussels on Wednesday.

Pires in fact did not feature in the 2-1 victory over Spain - that perhaps saved him from a talking-to from his mother, who hails from Oviedo.

It remains to be seen if he will feature against the Portuguese in a match that would leave his father with divided loyalties - he comes from the Portuguese town of Braga.



Portuguese striker Nuno Gomes (C) warming up along with his teammates during a practice session at Ermelo on June 26. —AFP photo