



EUROPEAN FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000



It's Juve time

AMSTERDAM, June 29: France's last-minute victory over Portugal has lined up an intriguing finale to Euro 2000 for Juventus fans - whoever wins the other semifinal here between Italy and Holland, reports AFP.

The closing stages of the tournament have underlined the Turin club's importance to European football, and its dominant position in terms of both the transfer market and player development.

Wednesday night's match-winner for France, Zinedine Zidane, is the shining example. After joining the club from Bordeaux in 1996, his exposure to Serie A and Champions League soccer has matured him into probably the world's best midfielder.

However, Zidane is not the only Frenchman here with ties to the Turin club.

Captain Didier Deschamps won the 1996 European Cup with Juventus before leaving for Chelsea while Thierry Henry, who opened the scoring against the Portuguese, had a short but unhappy spell in Turin before joining Arsenal last season.

And in their latest splash on the transfer market, Henry's strike partner with "Les Bleus", David Trezeguet, has already agreed a move that should be announced once this tournament is over.

Italy's squad is predictably packed with men who play in the famous black and white stripes.

Seven members of the "Squadra Azzurra" are currently on the team's books - Gianluca Zambrotta, Ciro Ferrara, Mark Juliano, Gianluca Pessotto, Antonio Conte, Filippo Inzaghi and Alessandro Del Piero.

An eighth, Angelo Di Livio, left in 1999 after six years during which he helped them become Italian, European and world champions.

Italy's team chief Dino Zoff was meanwhile both an outstanding goalkeeper for the club, winning six league titles and a UEFA Cup during his playing career, and later became their coach - winning one UEFA Cup and an Italian Cup.

However, even if Italy were to lose at the Arena here on Thursday night, Juventus fans back home would still be able to see their favourite players in action this weekend.

Zidane would find his passage towards the Dutch goal in Sunday's final being barred by the very man whose combative, unflinching work in midfield every weekend gives him that freedom to move up - Edgar Davids.

What the papers say

PARIS, June 29: French newspapers heaved a collective sigh of relief Thursday following the last-ditch French victory over Portugal in the Euro 2000 semifinals, reports AFP.

"A Golden Penalty!", headlined L'Equipe of the 119th minute penalty spot strike from man-of-the-match Zinedine Zidane which took France into the final on the "Golden Goal" rule.

L'Equipe said it was "an incredible end to a semi-final full of suspense." It also paid tribute to goalkeeper Fabien Barthez calling him "the impregnable fortress."

The Manchester United-bound Barthez made a wonderful reflex save from an Abel Xavier header almost on the final whistle of regulation time to keep France in the match.

"France Qualifies at the Death," Le Figaro exhorted on its front page calling the 2-1 extra-time win over the Portuguese "a tremendous battle." Roger Lemerre's men "can now go ahead with their dream and their incredible adventure."

Champs Elysees comes alive

PARIS, June 29: Thousands of people gathered Wednesday evening in celebratory mood on the Champs Elysees in Paris as football fans celebrated France's qualification for the Euro 2000 final, reports AFP.

France, who will play Holland and Italy, qualified by virtue of a 2-1 extra-time semi-final win over Portugal, sealed by a golden goal from the penalty spot by Zinedine Zidane.

Across Paris outside the Hotel de Ville (City Hall) an estimated 11,000 people had watched the match on a giant screen.

After victory was secured, convoys of cars travelled through the streets with many people brandishing Tricolor flags and car horns being sounded in a cacophony of noise while flares were lit.

Earlier France's huge Portuguese community - estimated at 800,000 - had also been contributing to the atmosphere but after the result the French fans started chanting "On n'entend plus chanter les Portugais" (We can't hear the Portuguese singing any more).

The scenes will doubtless be vastly exceeded should France win the final in Rotterdam on Sunday.

In 1998 an estimated 2 million people swamped the Champs Elysees to welcome the victorious World Cup winning team on an open-top bus.



DID I DO THAT INTENTIONALLY? Portugal midfielder Abel Xavier (R) argues with referee Guenter Benko after the former handled an acutely angled goal-bound shot from Frenchman Sylvain Wiltord near the goal line and France were awarded with a penalty in the sudden death extra time during the first semifinal of the Euro 2000 in Brussels on June 28.

Zinedine a class act

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): World Cup star Zinedine Zidane confirmed his hero status for France after scoring a golden goal penalty winner to propel France into the Euro 2000 final in a dramatic 2-1 win over Portugal on Wednesday.

Zidane, who scored two goals in France's 3-0 World Cup Final win over Brazil in 1998, struck in the last minute of extra-time with a spot kick after taking over penalty duties from Youri Djorkaeff, who did not play in this match.

"For the penalty I just put down the ball and I said to myself I must hit it as hard as possible. It went in OK so much the better for us," said Zidane.

"Our objective has always been victory in the final. It will be even harder on Sunday."

With five minutes of extra time left, substitute David Trezeguet ran into the box and was challenged by Portugal keeper Vitor Baia. The ball spun to Sylvain Wiltord who fired from an acute angle on the right and Abel Xavier deflected the ball behind the goal with his hand.

The Portuguese players reacted with fury and it was not until the 119th minute that Zidane was able to take the kick but he proved up to the task.

Earlier, Nuno Gomes had scored with a great curling left foot shot in the 19th minute and Thierry Henry equalised six minutes after the break.

Zidane is used to high acclaim and in January 1999 was given the European and World Player of the Year awards following his World Cup exploits in 1998.

Born on June 23, 1972 in Marseille as one of five children to Algerian parents Zinedine supported Marseille football club - his first footballing hero was Marseille's Uruguayan star Enzo Francescoli after whom Zidane later named his first son.

He began his career at Cannes, more famous for launching cinema stars than footballing talent, but it was after moving to Bordeaux in 1992 that Zidane first started to make name for himself outside of France.

He was part of the team which qualified through the Intertoto Cup before losing to

Bayern Munich in the final of the 1996 UEFA Cup.

That same year Zidane went with Aime Jacquet's team to Euro 96 in England but a persistent thigh injury meant that he did not impress even though France reached the semi-finals.

He had meanwhile agreed to move to Italian giants Juventus and later that year lifted the Intercontinental Cup (World Cup Championship) and European Super Cup with the Turin side.

In 1997 and 1998 he pocketed the Serie A title but in both those years he had to settle for runners-up spot in the Champions League, to Borussia Dortmund and Real Madrid respectively.

But Zidane's hour was about to come in France 98 and his two headed goals in the first half put France on course for a 3-0 victory in the World Cup Final.

He has been outstanding in Euro 2000 and his penalty confirms his appetite for the big occasion as world champions France now look forward to a final against either Holland or Italy in Rotterdam on Sunday.

Birthday boy Barthez

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): Fabien Barthez celebrated his 29th birthday on Wednesday with a heroic performance in France's 2-1 extra-time victory over Portugal in the Euro 2000 semi-final.

His reflex save from a Abel Xavier power header shortly before full-time was arguably the stop of the tournament so far leaving the big Portuguese defender holding his head in his hands in disbelief.

Several minutes before the match outside the King Baudouin stadium, Raymond Goethals, who was coach of Barthez when Marseille won the 1993 European Cup, said Barthez would earn France victory.

Once again the astute Goethals was spot on. "He's the best keeper in the world when he's confident," Goethals told a small group of people.

Teammate Laurent Blanc, a friend of Barthez who kisses him on top of his shaven head for luck at the start of big matches, once said of him: "I

adore this unpredictable guy. I completely trust him. He's going to have a great Euro."

Blanc, known as "the President" for his authority in the dressing room, knows what he's talking about and Barthez did not disappoint.

World Cup victory however has had its negative consequences for Barthez. The darling of the French public from near Toulouse in the southwest was thrust on to the front pages of glossy magazines and can't go anywhere in his home country without being recognised.

At first amused, Barthez quickly began to tire of the media frenzy surrounding him although it enabled him to meet his girlfriend, top model Linda Evangelista.

Barthez has not found it easy adjusting to fame. The emotional highs of a world title followed by a glamorous romance - he met Evangelista after a reception at St Tropez for the world championship winning team - has taken its toll.

He has also had devastating

moments in his personal life with the recent death of his grandfather and Evangelista's miscarriage while carrying their child.

Last season he had injuries after the other and missed 17 matches for Monaco and his morale took a battering.

While going through this trying period, he lost his temper with coach Claude Puel the day after Monaco lost in the French league in Marseille.

Barthez then decided to leave the principality and joined 1999 European Cup winners Manchester United on a six-year contract.

In each of the four of the five matches he has played so far in this June 10 to July 2 event, he has made great saves.

Most memorable have been a shot from Czech Republic's Vladimir Smicer, an attempted lob by Spain's Raul, and a header from Portugal's Abel Xavier just before full-time.

Barthez will be a key figure in Sunday's final at Rotterdam when France take on the winner of the Holland-Italy game.

History is calling

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): France's unblemished finals record makes them a good bet to become the first World Cup winners to add the European title after Zinedine Zidane's last-gasp golden penalty winner capped a fine team effort against Portugal.

Zidane strode to the spot and fired home confidently for a 2-1 victory at the King Baudouin stadium on Wednesday night after Thierry Henry's 51st minute goal equalized Portugal's 19th minute opener by Nuno Gomes.

France went on to win the 1984 European Championship and the 1998 World Cup in their only other two major finals appearances but they were on home soil on both occasions.

Sunday's final in Rotterdam (1800 GMT), against Italy or Holland who play in Amsterdam on Thursday, would test their nerves away from home.

France lost both penalty shootouts of their eight semi-finals in World Cups or European championships to date - to Germany in the 1982 World Cup and to the Czech Republic at Euro 96.

Considering the penalty fired over the bar by Spain's Raul against France in the dying seconds of their quarter-fi-

nal, Zidane must have had a tense moment as he marched to the spot.

Perhaps the confidence of a world champion gave the Juventus playmaker strength and he hit a firm shot ironically in the same part of the goal Raul was aiming at high to the left.

France's 22-man squad, with

Numan expects to be fit

AMSTERDAM, June 29: Rangers Dutch defender Arthur Numan insists he will be fit for the start of the new season despite missing out on Holland's Euro 2000 finale, reports AFP.

The 30-year-old has torn a tendon on the base of his right foot which has ruled him out of Thursday's semi-final with Italy and a possible final place.

However, he has assured the Rangers faithful he will be ready in time for the big kick-off at home to St Johnstone on July 29.

"I am still bitterly disappointed that I will miss the remainder of Euro 2000 but I will be okay for the start of the season with Rangers," Numan told the Press Association.

only four not at the World Cup, have made winning a habit.

Their 3-2 defeat in their last group game at the hands of hosts Holland may have ended a 16-match unbeaten run but the game meant nothing as they had already qualified and coach Roger Lemerre fielded a below-strength team.

France's virtually impenetrable defence of Lilian Thuram, Marcel Desailly, Laurent Blanc and Bixente Lizarazu have not lost for four years and in the 25 games they have started.

Behind their miserly rearguard, Fabien Barthez capped a superb performance of goal keeping skills with a fabulous block high to his left from a Abel Xavier header just before full-time.

The good work of Barthez kept defeat at bay against Portugal who would have reached the first major final of their history having lost in semi-finals at the 1966 World Cup and the 1984 European championships.

Instead it is France who are on the verge of creating history by adding this event to their world title though Germany did it the other way round in 1972 and 1974.

TOURNEY TREATS

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): Euro 2000 diary for Thursday, the 20th day of the tournament: ABOUT PENALTIES

In the 29 Euro 2000 games played so far a total of only 10 penalties have been awarded. Eight have been successful and two have been missed. Five of those which resulted in goals were match winners, most notably in the France-Portugal semi-final when Zinedine Zidane put France through to the final with the first "Golden Goal" of the tournament.

PELE ON ZZ

Pele's former sidekick in the great Brazilian attack of the 1979 World Cup finals, Tostao says he has been mesmerised by the performance of French playmaker Zinedine Zidane at the Euro 2000 finals.

"Zidane is perhaps not the best player in the world, but he is the one who catches my eye through his elegance, his perfect technical ability, his vision, the way he carries himself and protects the ball," Tostao wrote in the Jornal do Brasil.

All he lacks is goal-scoring skills, Tostao said. "If he was a finisher like Rivaldo, he would be almost perfect, up there with Platini and Zico."

COUNT DI BIAGO OUT

Midfielder Luigi di Biagio has lost coach Dino Zoff he wants no part of it if the Euro 2000 semi-final between Italy and the Netherlands goes to a penalty shoot-out.

Di Biagio is still traumatised by his missed penalty-kick in the 1998 World Cup quarter-finals against France which sent his team crashing out of the tournament.

GOALSCORERS

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): Euro 2000 scorers after the Portugal-France semi-final here Wednesday:

- 5 - Patrick Kluijvert (Ned), Savo Milesevic (Yug)
- 4 - Nuno Gomes (Por)
- 3 - Zlatko Zahovic (Slo), Sergio Conceicao (Por), Thierry Henry (Fra)
- 2 - Hakan Sukur (Tur), Alan Shearer (Eng), Alfonso (Spa), Frank De Boer (Ned), Boudevijn Zenden (Ned), Vladimir Smicer (Cze), Francesco Totti (Ita), Filippo Inzaghi (Ita), Marc Overmars (Ned), Gaizka Mendietia (Spa), Youri Djorkaeff (Fra), Zinedine Zidane (Fra)
- 1 - Bart Goor (Bel), Emile Mpenza (Bel), Johan Mjallby (Swe), Antonio Conte (Ita), Okan Buruk (Tur), Laurent Blanc (Fra), Sylvain Wiltord (Fra), Viorel Moldovan (Rom), Mehmet Scholl (Ger), Paul Scholes (Eng), Steve McManaman (Eng), Luis Figo (Por), Joao Pinto (Por), Steffen Iversen (Nor), Miran Pavlin (Slo), Ljubinko Drulovic (Yug), Stefano Fiore (Ita), Karel Poborsky (Cze), Ronald de Boer (Ned), Costinha (Por), Raul (Spa), Joseba Etxeberria (Spa), Luigi di Biagio (Ita), Henrik Larsson (Swe), Alessandro Del Piero (Ita), Cristian Chivu (Rom), Michael Owen (Eng), Ioan Ganea (Rom), Dejan Govedarica (Yug), Munitis (Spa), Slodobod Komljenovic (Yug), Christophe Dugarry (Fra), David Trezeguet (Fra)

(Own goals)

- 1 - Dejan Govedarica (Yug)

Portugese press in mourning

LISBON, June 29: Sadness, bitterness and anger were the prevailing moods here on Thursday as the local press dissected Portugal's exit from Euro 2000 after Wednesday night's 2-1 semi-final defeat to France, reports AFP.

"Don't cry Portugal" headlined A Bola alongside a photograph of Fernando Couto hugging a tearful Sergio Conceicao.

A brilliant showing in the European Championships cannot be tarnished by an inglorious defeat," the sporting daily added.

That was also the mood at the Record which added that it was sad a dream held for many years had been lost on the whim of a referee's decision - a reference to Austrian referee Guenter Benko's decision to award France a spotkick after Portugal's Abel Xavier was penalised for handling.

The sports paper recognised however that France was in the end "a superior team, better balanced in every domain, and more mature."

One word dominated Visao's front page - "Injustice" - the paper commenting: "Portugal, the great revelation of Euro 2000, were eliminated by France on a cruel and dubious penalty."

The tabloid 24 Horas accused "the Austrian referee of plotting against Portugal, the victim of a debatable penalty."

The Correio da Manha lamented the "shattered dream" by "a dubious penalty after 115 minutes of great play."

For Publico it was a "sad ending" by "a very hard penalty," while Diario de Noticias, under the headline "death penalty" carried a photograph of a Portuguese fan in tears behind the stadium's fencing.

On a more positive note the Jornal de Noticias had "Congratulations" plastered over its cover "but at the same time regretting later that 'the referee had killed off a beautiful dream'."



Portuguese manager Humberto Coelho (C) tries to calm down his charges after a penalty decision went in favour of France. —AFP photo

Coelho calls it quits

BRUSSELS, June 29: Portuguese coach Humberto Coelho immediately announced his resignation after Portugal's 2-1 semi-final loss to France in the Euro 2000, reports AP.

"This is the end of two years' very hard work and I would like to thank everybody," said the former Benfica defender said after the match late Wednesday.

"As of July 31, I will no longer be coach," Coelho added moments after a Zinedine Zidane "golden goal" penalty had ended Portugal's best run in a major tournament since the 1984 European championship.

Coelho, 50, said it was time for another coach to take over by the time Portugal begin their World Cup 2002 campaign in September. He had been national team coach for the past two seasons.

Despite leading Portugal to the semi-final and attracting international praise for the team's exciting, attacking soccer, Coelho had always faced

opposition from within the Portuguese soccer federation.

At a news conference after the team's qualification for the quarterfinals, he lashed out at his critics. "There are many people who did not want us to be where we are now," he complained.

Federation President Gilberto Madal gave away no hints after the match as who might replace Coelho, but the said somebody was needed to lead the national team through the next World Cup and the 2004 European Championship which Portugal will host.

Despite media reports of discontent among players with Coelho's style, they stood by the coach.

"I know he had his reason, problems with the federation, but I send him my compliments," said Sergio Conceicao.

"The players were not part of the problems between the coach and the federation," added Rui Costa. "We just wanted to go to the end of this tournament."

Coelho had a long and distinguished playing career with Benfica and Portugal. A tough but creative libero, who became known as the "Portuguese Beckenbauer," he earned 64 caps and a permanent place in the nation's affections.

In contrast, his coaching experience was limited to a couple of undistinguished seasons at also-ran clubs Salgueiros and Braga.

But when the Portuguese federation was desperate for a new coach after the national team's traumatic failure to reach the France 1998 World Cup, Coelho seemed a dependable choice.

He could hardly have had a worse start, a 0-3 thrashing by England on its debut.

Since then, Coelho turned a collection of notoriously individualistic talents into an effective unit which earned the admiration of the soccer world with wins over England, Romania, Germany and Turkey in Euro 2000, before Wednesday's contentious defeat by France.

Lost 'Golden Generation'

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AFP): Once again Portugal's self-styled "Golden Generation" has fallen at the final hurdle. They may never get the chance again.

Wednesday's heart-breaking 1-2 loss to France in the Euro 2000 semi-finals devastated the Portuguese camp and it may take several weeks or months to sift through the debris of defeat.

Mustache coach Humberto Coelho was the first to go, resigning minutes after Zinedine Zidane had curled in the winning penalty goal against his side.

What the future holds for Luis Figo, Rui Costa, Paulo Sousa and Fernando Couto - stalwarts of the brilliant Portuguese sides which dominated world youth football in the early 1990s - remains to be seen.

They are all still young enough to take part in the qualifiers for the 2002 World Cup which get underway later this year, but the priority for Portugal is preparing for Euro 2004 which they are hosting.

By that time they will all be well into their thirties and the first task for the incoming coach will be to decide whether to stick by these talented, but ageing playmakers or draw a

curtain on them and prepare for the future.

New players have made their mark over the last three weeks in Belgium and the Netherlands, notably striker Nuno Gomes with four goals in the tournament, winger Sergio Conceicao who scored a hat-trick against Germany and Costinha who headed the last-minute winner against Romania.

If it turns out to have been the last hurrah for the Portuguese stars, it was both a sad and ugly way to end it all.

After a promising first-half centered around Nuno Gomes' superb 19th minute strike, Portugal were largely outplayed by France with Zidane dominating the midfield over Figo and Rui Costa.

Figo, outstanding in his three previous games, in particular looked out of sorts and although Rui Costa was more in evidence, he seldom looked like breaching the experienced French defence.

And when Austrian referee Guenter Benko made the handball award against defender Abel Xavier for the French penalty winner, Portugal's team of superstars lost their cool.

They rounded first on Benko and then on Slovak linesman Igor Sramka who had spotted the hand-ball and signalled it to the man in the middle.

The result was a red card for Nuno Gomes and the sight of a disgruntled Figo marching off the field with his shirt torn off shouting obscenities.

The Portuguese players were unrepentant in post-match interviews saying that the referee's first instinct not to award a penalty had been the proper one.

"The linesman was against us the whole game," wing-back Dinias said.

"There were three or four things which everyone saw but he didn't give."

Then having that final decision where the referee gives a corner, but the linesman overrules from 30 metres away - that won the game for France."

European governing body UEFA has asked its disciplinary committee to look at what happened and recommend on possible sanctions against the Portuguese.

But the trauma of defeat and the realisation that their last chance of major competition success at the senior level may have gone will outweigh any suspensions for Portugal's pride.

Belgians' sigh of relief

BRUSSELS, June 29 (AP): The country said farewell to Euro 2000 Wednesday. Bittersweet memories will long linger.

The run-up to the last game, a 2-1 overtime semi-final win of France over Portugal, was spoiled with a bomb scare but after police checked subway trains and stations it was clear it had been hoax.

It only highlighted how security issues had dominated everything which happened in Belgium, the co-host of the event with the Netherlands.

The Belgians were given the short end of the stick. Its national team was eliminated in the first round - an embarrassing first for a host country, and two cities were thrashed by hooligans.

Belgian politicians had hoped the tournament would highlight a positive image of their country attracting, but after a troubled three weeks, it remained unclear.

Meanwhile, the Dutch have been parting it up, with no major riots or security headaches to complain about, and its national team still favourite to win the championship final which will be played in Rotterdam on Sunday.

Belgium hosted 15 games in four stadiums, while the Netherlands hosted 16 including the final.

The negative image of hooligans still haunts many Belgians after English fans ran amok in Brussels and Charleroi before and after the controversial game between Germany and England a dozen days ago.

Euro 2000 organisers promised local businesses they would reap the rewards of thousands upon thousands of soccer supporters who would descend on their cities to spend money galore.

In Brussels, business owners are angry and dismayed that Euro 2000 has brought them nothing but misery.

Since the riots "we received a lot less Belgian or tourist clientele, they fear coming to the centre of town," said Leo Vodak, manager of one of Brussels' most famous and historic cafes, The Falstaff. Because of location near the city's landmark Grand Place square, it suffered badly during the hooligan riots of June 16-17.

"We lost one million francs (24,000 dollars) in two weeks of business," he said.

"Our kitchen was filled with tear gas due to the riots, our cooks could not work," said Vodak. Some 450 mostly English fans were detained during the weekend of violence.

In all, police detained 1,301 supporters during the past two weeks, of which 758 were English.

Vodak said that all cafes and restaurants were forced to close early on game days after the first night of riots, further angering restaurant owners and alienating customers who usually come to sit at the hundreds of terraces that line the historic market square.

Many business owners were critical of Mayor Francois-Xavier de Donnea's tactics in dealing with soccer fans. The police's "zero-tolerance" policy worked, De Donnea said.

Despite the absence of English fans, barricades were once again placed at each entrance way to the Grand Place on Wednesday to filter out supporters, which according to police were not allowed on the square.

And as if only a bad memory, fans and supporters, wearing different shirts and of different nationality sat at the terraces of the cafe "Le Fiacre" which was the focal point of a police raid made famous on television screens around the world.

"We had less than expected business. The riots hurt us," said Omar Ladram, who works as a cook at one of the Greek and North African kebab restaurants near the Grand Place.

In host cities like Bruges, local businesses also complained that Euro 2000 failed to bring more hotel lodgings.