



PHOTO: INTERNET SOURCE

Swedish grace

AFP, Stockholm

A Swedish sense of fair play was evident in Sunday's press coverage of the national team's nail-biting Euro 2004 quarter-final penalty shoot-out defeat by the Netherlands.

"Penalties brought Sweden down," said Dagens Nyheter's front-page headline, underneath a large photograph showing the fatal moment when Dutch keeper Edwin van der Sar saved a penalty kick by Swedish captain Olof Mellberg, the second Swede to miss, after Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Dagens Nyheter said it was "unlucky" that Sweden went down this way, especially after Henrik Larsson and Freddie Ljungberg hit the post and the crossbar during extra time, which ended 0-0, forcing the penalty shootout, which the Dutch won 5-4.

Instead of attributing blame, Dagens Nyheter thanked Mellberg "for everything you and the team have given us this (Saturday) evening and this summer".

Svenska Dagbladet hailed the match as "an unbelievable thriller" and praised the Dutch goalkeeper for his save of Mellberg's penalty,

calling van der Sar "the Dutch wizard between the goalposts".

Swedish tabloids also kept their disappointment under control, with Aftonbladet, with just a hint of criticism, saying Zlatan Ibrahimovic missed because he was "psyched out" by the intensity of the match.

Expressen, generously, said "Thank you, boys, for a match that we will never forget", adding that this included the unlucky Zlatan, who just over a week ago was a hero for his extraordinary equaliser in the 1-1 draw with Italy.

"It is necessary to let the disappointment of the defeat pass, to digest it," said Zidane, whose injury during the 2002 World Cup final played a large part in their limp defence of that title.

"It is true that is a lot to take, with the World Cup, the Euro... we will see, I don't know yet."

"At a certain point one must know it is time to change the personnel."

"It is of course imperative something changes and to change it one cannot wait till six months before the 2006 World Cup finals."

"I have not decided yet, I do not know what I am going to do. I will think about it and afterwards we will see."

Zidane, who like fellow Real superstars David Beckham, Luis Figo and Raul Alvaro underperformed at Euro reflecting the dreadful slump their Spanish side had endured from January onwards, said regarding the new coach he had a favourite but was not going to reveal who it was.

The favoured two candidates at the moment - though there are nine applicants - are former midfield great Jean Tigana, who coached Monaco to the 1997 title, and Zidane's fellow World Cup and Euro winning team-mate Laurent Blanc.

"I have my preference but I will keep it to myself," said the ever discreet playmaker.

While clearly stung by the criticism of his performances, Beckham insists he will shake off the disappointment of England's quarter-final defeat by Portugal and come back stronger for it, perhaps with the help of some consoling words from Beckham Jr.

"Brooklyn's started playing football and been to football training and he gets upset when he doesn't score a goal or doesn't win a game," Beckham revealed.

"Even on the arcade games he gets upset when he doesn't finish it. I've explained to him that you can't win every time and maybe he'll explain that to me when I arrive home."

The 55-year-old said he was less than a 50 percent chance to take over the German national side as his wife wanted the former mathematics professor to do something else.

"There is less than a 50 percent chance that I will succeed him," the coach known as the 'Gentleman' told Sunday newspaper Welt am Sonntag.

"My wife would be delighted that I do something else," added Hitzfeld, who is the only coach to have won the Champions League with two different teams, Borussia Dortmund (1997) and Bayern Munich (2001).

Hitzfeld, who had said earlier in the week he would like to coach the team after Voller stepped down when the 2002 World Cup finalists went out of Euro 2004 in the first round, also said if he were to take up the challenge it would come with a condition.

"If I do it, I will do it only if I have Michael Henke (who has been his deputy since 1991) as my assistant," said Hitzfeld.

The cooling of interest by Hitzfeld, who won two domestic championships at Dortmund (1996, 1997) and four at Bayern (1999, 2000, 2001, 2003), follows Greek coach Otto Rehhagel's declining to even be considered as a candidate.

However for 44-year-old Voller, Hitzfeld is the logical choice.

"Ottmar is because of his success, his experience, his status and his style, a very good and logical solution for the national team," said Voller, who was in charge of the team for four years.

"As coach of the national side, you must protect your team at all times even after defeats, which was not possible after Euro 2004," added the World Cup winning striker.

a photo-shoot with my children and never will and as far as I'm concerned I will protect them as much as I can."

Beckham insists that he is capable of blanking out all the strains created by media intrusion into his private life and hinted that they could force him to quit Real Madrid.

Speaking candidly after England's quarter-final exit from Euro 2004, Beckham said he would be forced to "take a long look" at his situation if his two young boys, who are due to join him in Madrid this summer, are not spared the intense scrutiny that follows their father's every move.

"The intrusion and the invasion into my life is tough because I've got children and I want them to enjoy their lives but people will just say 'why's he complaining?'," the England captain said.

"I'm not complaining but of course it's tough. It's tough on any family."

Asked if the level of media attention he received had become intolerable, Beckham replied: "I think it's reached that a few times this year because the move to Spain is a new environment, people are not used to me there. In Manchester I was able to go to the Trafford (shopping) Centre and walk around with my family."

"That's not possible in Spain. I can't go out of my front door and people know that."

The media's fascination with Beckham, his pop-star wife Victoria and sons Brooklyn and Romeo reached new levels earlier this year when the player, who moved from Manchester United to Madrid in July 2003 while his family remained in England, was reported to have had an affair with his former personal assistant, Rebecca Loos.

Beckham denied the claims but has not taken any legal action against newspapers which published them.

Shortly after the reports emerged, it was announced that Victoria and the two boys would be moving to Madrid this summer, killing speculation Beckham would return to play for Chelsea in his native London in order to save his marriage.

"I had them around me more than people realised last season," Beckham said. "My wife was there most of the time apart from when Brooklyn was at school. It's always nice to be with your family and we finally have got Brooklyn in a school."

"One of the reasons why Brooklyn didn't go in a school was because of the press attention. I was told by fellow Real star Zinedine Zidane that his children were in school and for the first two months there were people filming his kids in the playground."

"I'm personally not prepared to put my children in that situation. If that's the situation I will take a long look at it. I'm very protective over my children."

"People say I do photo-shoots with my children. I've never done

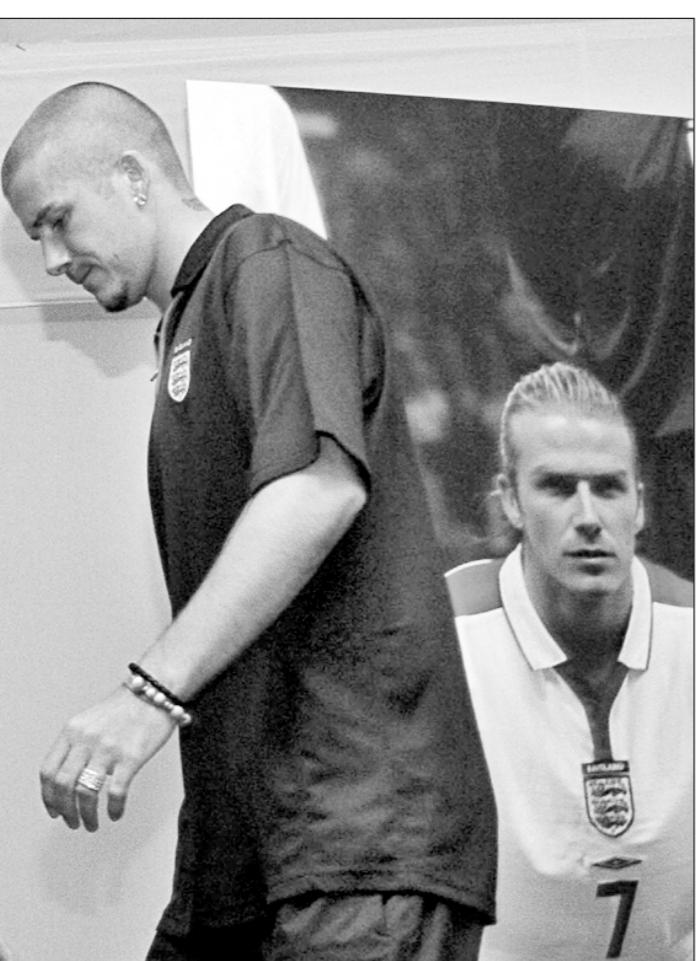


PHOTO: AFP

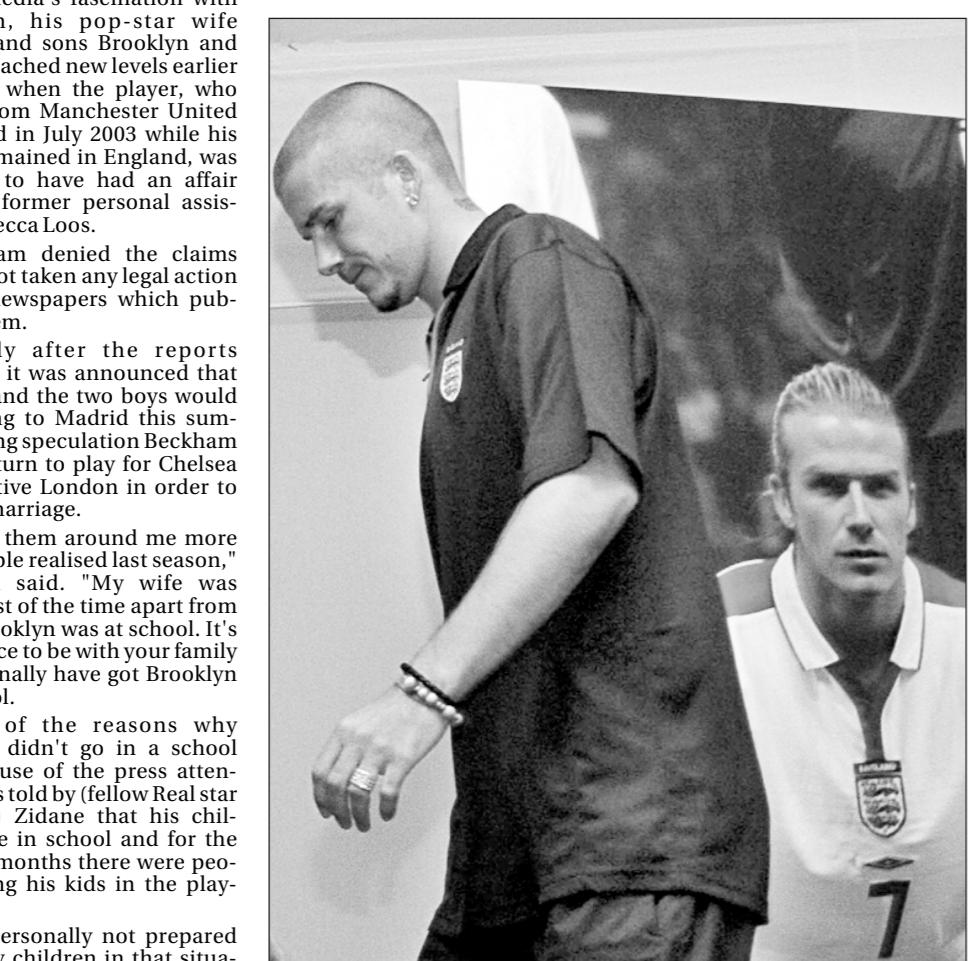


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Zidane taking time

AFP, Paris

France's two-time world footballer of the year Zinedine Zidane said on Sunday he hadn't made up his mind as to whether he would retire from international football following his country's disappointing defence of their European title.

The 32-year-old told French TV station TF1 he would need more time but after another failed campaign to defend a title by France and with a new manager set to replace the departed Jacques Santini there would inevitably be changes to personnel - with immediate effect.

Zidane like several of his fellow World Cup and Euro 2000 winning team-mates seemed a shadow of the player that he once was and was virtually anonymous in the shock 1-0 defeat by Greece in the quarter-final match on Friday.

This has led to much speculation as to who of the 'golden generation' will stay or retire with captain Marcel Desailly at 35 and clearly on the wane looking certain to play his 117th and last match for Les Bleus against his country of birth, Ghana, in August in Rennes.

However Zidane like his former Bordeaux team-mate Bixente Lizarazu said he had not made up his mind yet.

"It is necessary to let the disappointment of the defeat pass, to digest it," said Zidane, whose injury during the 2002 World Cup final played a large part in their limp defence of that title.

"It is true that is a lot to take, with the World Cup, the Euro... we will see, I don't know yet."

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While clearly stung by the criticism of his performances, Beckham insists he will shake off the disappointment of England's quarter-final defeat by Portugal and come back stronger for it, perhaps with the help of some consoling words from Beckham Jr.

"I don't do as much as people think I do. Yes, there's ads out there and photographs of me but people sometimes stick pictures of me on magazines week in and week out and say 'Exclusive' and people think I've done an exclusive."

"I've come to terms with that - it's the way my life is. But my family are number one, my football is number two and that's the way it will always be."

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While Vassell issued a statement to express his gratitude for the support he had received and say how devastated he was it will probably take him time to relate

Santini attacks players

AFP, Paris

Jacques Santini launched an astonishing attack on the French squad on Saturday blaming them for France's failure to defend their European title successfully following the shock 1-0 defeat by Greece on Friday.

In his final press conference as national coach before taking over ailing Premiership side Spurs the 52-year-old accused the players of taking advantage of his being too nice to them which was just about the only thing he accepted responsibility for.

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"There were maybe players who by the time they got here had already moved on from the era of

Santini, who had guided France to a 21 match unbeaten streak till the Greeks rudely dumped them out of the tournament.

Santini, who had a distinguished playing career as a midfielder being capped by France and played in the 1975 European Cup final for St Etienne against Bayern Munich, rejected suggestions he had damaged morale by announcing before the tournament he was leaving - instead it was the players who got the blame.

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"Clearly he had among others Marcel Desailly in mind, though his selection of him in the 2-2 draw with Croatia upset Bixente Lizarazu and almost cost the French the match."

"My choice visavis Marcel was always clear," said Santini.

relaxed a manner or saying we we were too good.

"In order to justify our favouritism tag we had to be really strong on top of our technical game, and that was what let us down in all four matches.

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back of delivering Lyon their first

title.

"We knew that to go further we needed to be more competitive than we had been in the previous matches. I think the squad had the necessary elements to achieve that but against Greece we only played for 45 minutes and that was not enough," added the former French international.

Santini said he had not noticed as some observers had several of the players smiling after the final whistle had gone on their Euro campaign.

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