

Medvedev signs UCL visa waiver

AFP, Moscow

Russian president Dmitry Medvedev on Wednesday signed an order allowing fans to use match tickets as entry visas for next week's Champions League final in Moscow.

"In the period between 18 and 25 May, 2008, foreign citizens and persons without citizenship, who are coming to Moscow to attend the Champions' League final will be able to enter the Russian federation territory without entry visas," the order runs.

"The supporters will have to show a valid match ticket, a valid passport and a completed immigration form upon entry to Russia."

The order came into force immediately after signing.

Manchester United and Chelsea clash in the Champions' League final on May 21 at Moscow's Luzhniki stadium.

Cech committed to Chelsea

AFP, Prague

Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech dismissed speculation over his future insisting here Wednesday that he was committed to Chelsea.

"I would like to stay at Chelsea, as long as possible," Cech told the Dnes newspaper.

He said he would like to be at the club after his current contract expires in 2010.

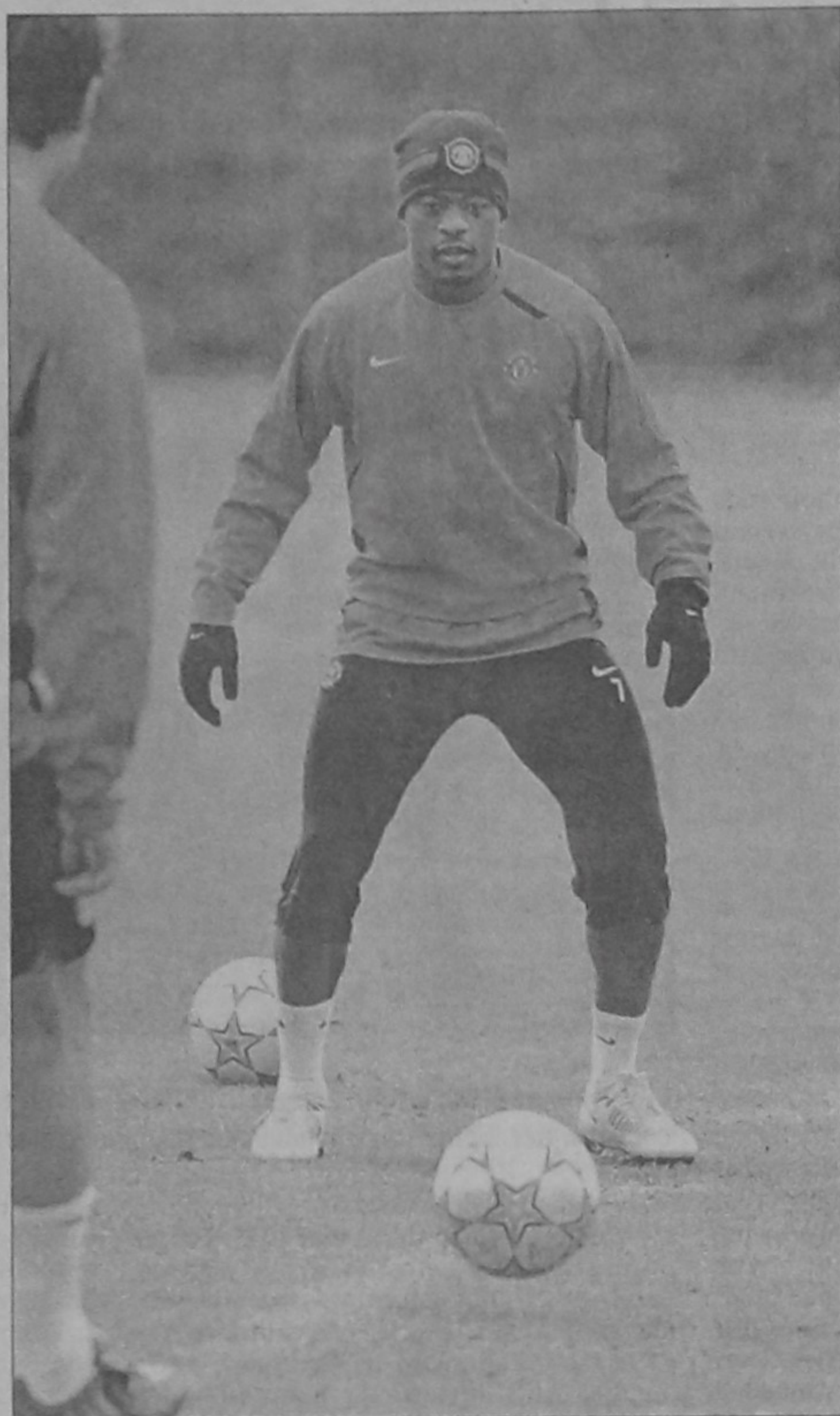
"It would not bother me if I stayed for the rest of my career at Chelsea. I can assure Chelsea fans that I do not want to leave. I am happy here," Cech added, saying that his sights were set on next week's Champions League final against Manchester United. Cech's future at Chelsea has been subject of an explosion of media speculation with Italian giant's AC Milan reported to be willing to make a 48 million euro (74.4 million dollar) bid for his services and Spanish club Barcelona also said to be interested. The London Evening Standard reported Tuesday that Chelsea was willing to top Cech's weekly wage by 20,000 pounds (25,160 euros) to 90,000 pounds to encourage him to stay at the club.

Evra to make amends



AFP, Manchester

Patrice Evra is relishing life in the fast lane with Manchester United and the France defender is determined not to let his side's Champions League bid get



An AFP file photo shows Manchester United defender Patrice Evra practise during a team training session at the Carrington training complex in Manchester on April 28, 2008.

shunted off the road.

United face Chelsea in the Champions League final in Moscow next Wednesday and Evra, who turns 27 on Thursday, is already gearing up for his second appearance in Europe's showpiece game.

The Senegalese-born defender played in the 2004 final with Monaco, but the French club were

surprise finalists and never threatened to test Porto in a forgettable 3-0 defeat.

Now Evra believes he has the perfect chance to make amends with a far more formidable United team fresh from retaining the English championship.

"My last final holds bad memories for me. But I joke that I went to the final with Monaco in a Fiat now I am going with the Ferrari. But now I need to drive the Ferrari very well," Evra said.

"This is the biggest game in my life now and I do not want to lose again."

"When I first joined Manchester United I said I didn't want to just go to a Champions League final I wanted to go and win it. That is what I intend to do."

"We have got stronger, we have more experience and the defence was better than last year. These are the keys to winning the title again and that is why we have won it."

Evra initially struggled to settle in Manchester after his move from Monaco in January 2006. He found it hard to adjust to English life, the pace of Premier League football and the irregular kick-off times.

Eating pasta for breakfast before one midday match made him throw up but the shock of being left out of France's World Cup squad due to his poor form forced Evra to raise his game.

"It was not the same as living in Monte Carlo that's for sure," he said. "I needed to take the step but it was very difficult for me and my family, then I missed the World Cup with France. I was very angry with myself."

Although he is more comfortable at Old Trafford now, he only has one year remaining on his current contract and is waiting to hear if United will offer him a satisfactory extension.

"My agent is speaking to the club," he said. "There has been one meeting and there has been nothing since. I have one year left, so the ball is in Manchester United's court."

"My job was to concentrate on winning the title and I have done it. Now my job is to concentrate on winning the Champions League. Let's see what happens after that."

Sweden name Euro squad

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden's provisional squad for the Euro 2008 final which are being co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland and run from June 7-29 announced on Tuesday:

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Andreas Isaksson (Manchester City/ENG), Rami Shaaban (Hammarby/SWE), Johan Wiland (Elsborg/SWE)

Defenders: Petter Hansson (Rennes/FRA), Mikael Nilsson (Panathinaikos/GRE), Andreas Granqvist (Wigan Athletic/ENG), Mikael Dorsin (Cluj/ROM), Daniel Majstorovic (FC Basel/SUI), Olof Mellberg (Aston Villa/ENG), Fredrik Stoor (Rosenborg/NOR)

Midfielders: Kim Kallstrom (Lyon/FRA), Niclas Alexandersson (IFK Gothenburg/SWE), Sebastian Larsson (Birmingham City/ENG), Daniel Andersson (Malmo FF/SWE), Fredrik Ljungberg (West Ham United/ENG), Anders Svensson (Elsborg/NOR), Christian Wilhelmsson (Nantes/FRA), Tobias Linderoth (Galatasaray/TUR)

Forwards: Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter Milan/ITA), Henrik Larsson (Helsingborgs IF/SWE), Johan Elmander (Toulouse/FRA), Markus Rosenberg (Werder Bremen/GER), Marcus Allback (FC Copenhagen/DEN)

Nedved extends with Juventus

AFP, Rome

Veteran Czech midfielder Pavel Nedved has signed a one-year contract extension with Juventus, the club said on Tuesday.

The news is a welcome boost to Juventus who will play in the Champions League next season after ensuring they will end this Serie A campaign in third place.

Nedved's contract will now last until the end of June 2009.

"This contract extension is the best way to reinforce the squad ahead of next season," said Juve administrator Jean-Claude Blanc.

"Pavel has been an integral part of Juventus's story and will continue to add character and quality to the team."

The Czech is 35 years old and joined Juve in 2001. He has played 282 matches and scored 58 goals.

EURO 2008 GROUPS

AFP, Vienna

At-a-glance guide to the Euro 2008 groups:

GROUP A: SWITZERLAND, CZECH REPUBLIC, PORTUGAL, TURKEY

Even with home advantage Switzerland will be struggling to make it into the next round against the likes of Portugal, out to go one better after coming up short in the 2004 final. Turkey only just scraped through to the finals unlike the slick Czechs, semifinalists in 2004 and favourites to go through with the Portuguese, though they have been hit by the absence of Tomas Rosicky and whether veteran Pavel Nedved will revise his decision and come out of international retirement.

GROUP B: AUSTRIA, CROATIA, GERMANY, POLAND

Germany, despite not winning a match at a Euro since their 1996

final success, are in pole here. Upwardly mobile Croatia, who famously did it for England in qualifying, will fancy their chances of going through on the Mannschaft's coat tails although Poland impressed on their path to their first finals, topping their table. Co-hosts Austria, the lowest ranked team ever to appear at a Euros, are set for a baptism of fire, though a close run friendly with the Dutch last month gives them some cause for hope.

GROUP C: THE NETHERLANDS, ITALY, ROMANIA, FRANCE

The mother of all groups of death producing the latest chapter in the long running Italy v France rivalry. Raymond Domenech warns that the treble-seeking French are undergoing a period of "reconstruction" and they could struggle especially as some of their older players are starting to show signs of

wear and tear. The Dutch, semi-finalists in 2004, qualified with a game to spare but have been affected as ever by internal divisions with veteran Clarence Seedorf refusing to be considered for selection, while progressive Romania won't be taken lightly by the big three.

GROUP D: GREECE, SWEDEN, SPAIN, RUSSIA
Otto Rehhagel's Greeks gate crashed Euro 2004, leaving many a so-called superpower nursing bloody noses, and set up their title defence with the best record of any of the 14 qualifiers. The Swedes scraped through to the finals behind perennial underachievers at this level, Spain, while the young Russians, in the care of the canny Guus Hiddink, will fancy their chances of doing something they didn't accomplish four years ago - making it past the first hurdle.

Gerrard wants big spending

AFP, Liverpool



Steven Gerrard admits Liverpool will only challenge for the Premier League

title next season if Rafa Benitez spends big money.

Gerrard is desperate to make up for another disappointing domestic campaign after Benitez's side slipped out of the title race by Christmas and finished nine points behind champions Manchester United.

Gerrard knows that gap won't be closed unless Benitez is given substantial backing from the Anfield board to bring in several world-class players.

Benitez has already met Liverpool co-owner Tom Hicks to draw up a transfer battle plan, with Aston Villa midfielder Gareth Barry and Borussia Dortmund defender Philip Degen on his wanted list, but Gerrard wants more investment from the Anfield hierarchy.

"Obviously I have to be careful that I don't send expectations

through the roof again, but for me I am desperate for it (a title challenge). I believe in this team and this manager and believe we can make it happen," Gerrard said.

"We need help and new players and the manager needs help from the board to make these signings happen and make us stronger."

"I don't know much about Rafa's transfer plans. He doesn't call me in and tell me names."

"But he does assure me and the other players that if anyone becomes available who would strengthen the side, then he will go out and buy them. It's important Rafa gets the right backing above him as well."

"Sometimes you have to realise there are other sides that are as good as us who are strengthening and working hard as well. They want it just as much as us."

"But it has been a long time for this club (since winning the league), so we all maybe need to give that extra five or 10 per cent."

"It's difficult to say how many world-class players we need. You look at the points difference and

over the last few years we have made it smaller."

"Playing against the Arsenal and Chelsea, it has been close. We are giving them good games which are tight and get decided on small details."

The close-season in England has often been a difficult time for Gerrard while rumours fly that he is set to leave. Inter Milan are this year's front runners to sign the Liverpool captain if reports are to be believed, but he insists he has no plans to quit.

"I'm happy here and enjoying my football. Obviously I am not happy ending the season without a trophy because I am a winner and that is what I play the game for," he said.

"I like finishing the season having a trophy or cup final to look back on and seeing I've achieved something."

"The experiences I've had at this club in Istanbul (when they beat AC Milan to capture the Champions League), Cardiff and so on - I want these again because I've enjoyed them so much."

SUMMARY OF EURO FINALS

AFP, Paris

Brief summaries of previous Euro finals in the lead-up to the Euro 2008 edition which is being co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland and runs from June 7-29:

1960

The Soviet Union claimed their one and only football title in the inaugural edition of the tournament which involved just four teams. The Soviets made the final on the back of a 3-0 win over Czechoslovakia while Yugoslavia emerged victorious in a nine goal thriller with hosts France which remains the highest scoring match in the tournament's history. However, the Soviets managed to keep a hold on the Yugoslav attack in the final and emerged 2-1 winners in extra-time.

1964

The Soviet Union returned to defend their title in Spain - but only after Spanish leader General Franco relented at allowing them into the country as he had refused to allow the Spanish to play in the 1960 edition because the Soviets were competing - but were to succumb to the hosts, who have struggled ever since to replicate their success. The Spanish had just made the final with a 2-1 win in extra-time over Hungary while the Soviets despatched Denmark 3-0. Spain went 1-0 up early on only for their opponents to peg them back at 1-1 but with six minutes remaining the hosts sealed their iconic status in Spain as Marcellino headed home the winner.

1968

Italy rebounded from a desperate 1966 World Cup final campaign to beat Yugoslavia in a replay after an initial final where they had been outplayed by the Yugoslavs in a 1-1 draw. However, the Italians pulled themselves together and a few days later beat their opponents 2-0. Italy had been very fortunate to make the final itself as it had literally gone down to a flip of the coin after their semifinal with the Soviet Union ended 0-0 after extra-time. The referee opted to flip a coin and the Italians called correctly, Yugoslavia had made it to the final courtesy of a 1-0 win over world champions England, Alan Mullery earning the dubious distinction of becoming the first Englishman to be sent-off.

1972

The advent of the great West German side of Sepp Maier, Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd 'Das Bomber' Muller as they cruised to a 3-0 final victory over the Soviet Union, which remains the biggest winning margin in the final in the tournament's history with Muller scoring two of them. The Germans had dispensed with hosts Belgium in the semifinals, Muller scoring twice, while the Soviets had beaten Hungary 1-0. The Germans were to go and confirm their status as the best team with victory in the 1974 World Cup final.

1976

Czechoslovakia added their name

to the roll call of champions and dethroned West Germany in the first penalty shootout. The Czechs had taken a 2-0 lead over the Germans, but with typical resilience and bloody-mindedness they came back to tie it at 2-2 and when extra-time failed to break the deadlock it was down to the shootout. A ray of light opened up for the Czechs as Uli Hoessner missed with his spot kick and up stepped Antonin Panenka who coolly slotted it high and straight down the middle into the net to secure the Czechs' victory. The Germans had also had to come back from 2-0 down in the semifinal with hosts Yugoslavia to eventually win 4-2 after extra-time, Dieter Muller showing that the surname was synonymous with goalscoring as he grabbed a hat-trick. The Czechs overcame the Dutch, who in an ill tempered match had two players sent-off.

1980

For the first time the tournament was enlarged to eight teams and produced a surprise finalist in Belgium, who were to lose 2-1 to West Germany in a tight match. Belgium had topped their group of four which included hosts Italy and England while the Germans - inspired by midfield dynamo Bernd Schuster - saw off old foes the Dutch and avenged their defeat by the Czechs four years earlier. Two goals from the unlikely figure of Horst Hrubesch - who was only in the side because of an injury to Klaus Fischer - saw off the Belgians, whose sole reply was from the penalty spot.

1984

France's much vaunted cavalier style football sailed success at last and at home to boot after the bitter disappointment of losing to West Germany in the 1982 World Cup semifinals. And they did it in some style, though, as usual did not do much for their fans' blood pressure especially in the semifinal against Portugal. The Portuguese forced extra-time and then to the shock of the home crowd took the lead eight minutes into extra-time. However, the French came back to level at 2-2 and then two of the 'Magic Carpet' quartet of French midfielders Jean Tigana and Michel Platini combined to conjure up the third and decisive goal in the final minute. Platini was to end the tournament as leading scorer adding his ninth of the competition in the final against Spain. While France had a player sent-off in Yvon Le Roux, Bruno Bellone grabbed a second for the French to give them a deserved victory and was to be the only one that the hugely talented side were to accrue as they were to be denied by the West Germans again in the 1986 World Cup semifinals.

1988

Another deserved winner in the Netherlands as they beat the Soviet Union 2-0 - having lost 1-0 to them

in the group stage -- and in the process spectators witnessed one of the greatest goals of all time, a stunning volley by Marco van Basten which had Soviet 'keeper Rinat Dasaev stumbling in shock at the effort. Hans van Breukelen got the Dutch out of jail late on with a penalty save. The Dutch like the French before them were never to add to the title, despite boasting players of the quality of van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard. On the way the Dutch had laid a few ghosts of their past especially in downing the hosts West Germany in the semifinals, van Basten grabbing a late winner, to add to the hat-trick he scored against the English - whose woeful campaign had started with a 1-0 defeat to the Republic of Ireland coached by 1966 World Cup winner Jack Charlton - in the group stage.

1992

Jokes about the best way of preparing for winning the European title was by lying on a beach and being given only a few days notice were not saved for the Germans but in the unlikely shape of Denmark. The Danes earned a late invitation to the European fest because Yugoslavia were barred because of the outbreak of war in the Balkans. 'I should have been putting in a new kitchen but then we were called away to play in Sweden,' recalled Danish coach Richard Moller-Nielsen. 'The kitchen is finished now. I had a professional decorator do it.' And well he could have afforded to as the Danes - whose major creative force Michael Laudrup opted not to play though his brother Brian did - saw off the holders The Netherlands in the semifinal, Peter Schmeichel saving a van Basten penalty in the shootout and then disposed of a now unified Germany 2-0 in the final - solid midfielder John Jensen earning himself a lucrative if unexpected move to Arsenal on the back of scoring in the final, something he was not to do very often for the Gunners.

1996

Hosts England almost ended 30 years of a drought in the trophy department but went out on penalties to Germany in the semifinals, Gareth Southgate becoming the latest Englishman who bottled it in the shootout -- the list was to get longer two years later in their World Cup loss to Argentina. Germany were to go on and beat the surprise packages of the tournament The Czech Republic 2-1 in the final thanks to a brace from Oliver Bierhoff, who was also to go down in history as the first man to score a golden goal winner in the competition's history. The tournament was also notable not so much for a rather faded series of performances by France but the emergence of the golden generation of

Zinedine Zidane, Bixente Lizarazu and several others who would be crowned world champions two years later in Paris.

2000

The golden generation were to experience another high as they added the Euro title to the World Cup in a final of high drama against Italy. Italy looked to be in the driving seat when Marco Delvecchio scored in the second-half but just as the Italians were preparing themselves for the trophy ceremony Sylvain Wiltord popped up to level and from there on in there was only going to be one winner with David Trezeguet settling the match with a golden goal in extra-time. France were worthy winners with Zidane a fresher figure than he had been four years previously - he hadn't been helped then by playing virtually non stop for a whole year as his then side Bordeaux went from the Interoto Cup to the UEFA Cup final and he also had been involved in a car crash -- whilst there was a slightly sour cloud thrown over the tournament with the Portuguese histrionics at the end of their semifinal with France having gone ballistic over a controversial penalty award, their coming from 2-0 down to beat England 3-2 would have been a far happier memory for their fans. Needless to say Zidane composed himself and slotted the penalty away. 'He has definitely come from God,' commented former Scotland coach Andy Roxburgh on the UEFA website. There are many in France who would agree.

2004

If the Danes had seemed the unlikely of winners in 1992 then Greece surely trumped them under the astute stewardship of German coach Otto Rehhagel. Right from the start they announced their potential as they beat hosts Portugal 2-1 in the opening match and they were never to be stopped after that as they became the most formidable Greek outfit to travel abroad since Helen launched a thousand ships to get her back from Troy. While Zidane had just about managed to get France through to the second round after a nerve-racking late penalty saw the French come from 1-0 down to beat England 2-1, there was nothing he could do against the Greeks as they eliminated the holders. French coach Jacques Santini had hardly helped morale by bizarrely announcing prior to the tournament that he would not be renewing his contract. Greece then put paid in the semifinals to the flamboyant talents of the Czech Republic, scoring a late silver goal in extra-time. Portugal were given the chance to avenge their opening defeat by the Greeks in the final but once again Greece stunned them as Angelos Charisteas' header settled the issue and left Luis Figo and his own 'golden generation' without a senior trophy to their name.



PHOTO: AFP

Kanoute's Friends team striker Thierry Henry (R) shakes hands with International team's goalkeeper Iker Casillas before their friendly match at the Sanchez Pizjuan Stadium in Seville on Tuesday.

Messi happy at Barca

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's Argentine striker Lionel Messi, who has reportedly sparked interest from English Premiership side Chelsea, said on Tuesday he wants to stay at the Spanish club.

"I am a Barcelona player and this is what matters most," he told radio La Red when asked about the press reports about Chelsea's desire to sign him.

"I have heard that Chelsea like me and I am very proud that such a great club are interested in me but I am happy here," the 20-year-old winger added.

Messi, the runner up for the 2007 World Player of the Year award, has already drawn comparisons to Diego Maradona, the inspiration behind Argentina reaching successive World Cup finals in 1986 and 1990, winning the former beating the then West Germany and losing to the same opposition in the second final.

He is under contract with Barcelona until 2014. Messi joined Barcelona's under-14 side in 2000 at the age of 13 and has quickly moved through the Catalan's side's youth squads until finally reaching the first team.

Cannavaro backs Del Piero

AFP, Rome



Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro has thrown his considerable weight behind the clamour for the inclusion of veteran striker Alessandro Del Piero in the country's Euro 2008 squad.

Del Piero has been left out of the most recent Italy squads by coach Roberto Donadoni but his fine form for Juventus in Serie A has thrust him into the spotlight.

The former golden-boy of Italian football started the season on the bench but forced himself into the Juve starting line-up and is currently joint top goalscorer in Serie A.

And now Cannavaro, who plays for Real Madrid, is convinced his former Juve teammate should be picked for the June showpiece event in Austria and Switzerland.

"Del Piero has had an exceptional season. He's done what he needed to do to be picked," Cannavaro told the Chi magazine in an article that will be published on Thursday.

However, the centre-back did not have such good news for another in-form player who many want to be reinstated into the national set-up: Antonio Cassano.

Currently on loan at Sampdoria, Cassano is actually a teammate of Cannavaro's at Real but that doesn't seem to have helped his cause.

"He's playing well but unfortunately he has several problems with his temperament."

"He's not a kid any more. He has to be careful or he'll lose his credibility."

Cassano has had a great season with Sampdoria but he also let himself down back in March when he was banned for five matches for threatening and insulting a referee who sent him off.

He also threw his shirt at the official and although he apologized

afterwards, it was too little, too late as even Donadoni claimed it was the kind of incident that could cost him his place in the squad.

Previous Euro winners

AFP, Vienna

1960 - Soviet Union
1964 - Spain
1968 - Italy
1972 - West Germany
1976 - Czechoslovakia
1980 - West Germany
1984 - France
1988 - The Netherlands
1992 - Denmark
1996 - Germany
2000 - France
2004 - Greece

একুনি যে কোন মোবাইল থেকে জেনে নিন
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