



IF THIS IS BETRAYAL, LET'S HAVE MORE OF IT: Russia's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink (in white shirt) runs for joy after his team's stunning 3-1 quarterfinal win over the Netherlands in the Euro 2008 at St. Jakob-Park in Basel on Saturday.

Guus magic goes on

AFP, Basel

Dutchman Guus Hiddink's magic touch on the international stage continued as his Russia side broke Holland's hearts with a shock 3-1 win to knock the Dutch out of Euro 2008.

The 61-year-old Hiddink had said he would be happy to be a Dutch traitor if his Russian team beat his countrymen and two goals in extra time settled the matter.

"I am extremely proud of the achievement of the team," said Hiddink, whose Russian team beat the Dutch after just two days of preparation against last week's 2-0 Group D win over Sweden.

"Our preparation after the Swedish game meant we had just two days to recover.

"We could hardly work tactically, we had just ten minutes at the stadium yesterday to prepare.

"To see what the team did, that is just an unbelievable performance. I have not experienced that in my career before."

Having got his wish to ditch the Dutch, Hiddink brought the curtain down on Marco van Basten's swansong as Holland coach after four years in charge.

Yet it was Hiddink who first approached ex-Ajax ace van Basten about becoming a coach.

Having won the European Cup in 1988 with PSV Eindhoven, former Netherlands coach Hiddink was the first coach to see van Basten as a potential manager.

"When I was Dutch team manager, around 1995, it was felt in the federation it was a pity if top players disap-

peared from the game," said Hiddink. "We felt we could take advantage of some world-class players like Marco.

"I approached him at the end of his career, but he said he wasn't sure it was for him and didn't feel he'd make a good coach.

"But that changed later on and he has done a very good job in a very short period of time."

Van Basten, 43, who had been bidding to become the first player to taste Euro success as a player and coach, raised a few eyebrows when he replaced Dick Advocaat as Netherlands coach after Euro 2004 but their opening phase form was highly impressive - even if it didn't last.

Hiddink, meanwhile, can now add a semifinal Euro 2008 berth to his already impressive record.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, this is the first time Russia have negotiated the group stage of a major tournament - at the fifth attempt.

The Russian press had dubbed Hiddink "a coaching wizard" long before his side reached Euro 2008 with the Dutchman having steered the Netherlands and South Korea to World Cup semifinals in 1998 and 2002 respectively.

"What else can you call him, given that he has taken so many teams to World Cups and European Championships," said Russian winger Yuri Zhirkov.

For Russia's playmaker Andrei Arshavin - who scored the Russians' third goal - there was no comparison between the two coaches.

"The side who won had the best Dutch coach," added Arshavin - and few would disagree.

Arshavin at his zenith

THE OBSERVER, undated

According to his club manager, Dick Advocaat, this was the night Zenit Saint Petersburg forward Andrei Arshavin could convince someone in the big leagues of Europe they should sign the 27-year-old.

"He told us he wants to change clubs," the Dutchman said, before wryly adding that while there were no offers "at present, the situation may well change after the game against Holland for the national side."

Well, if Advocaat hoped to oil a quick and profitable fire sale by gazing his player up, it did the trick. Against a muted but not impotent Holland, Arshavin was his side's pivotal player throughout most of the evening through his willingness to take possession, direct teammates and insist on shaping proceedings and capping things off with the third goal.

Earlier, during what has been a fine tournament so far, Guus Hiddink was asked if Arshavin would return for Russia's crucial final group game after missing the previous two because of suspension. The Russia head coach offered an ambivalent response. But, having included him in his squad knowing he might get only the single run-out, it was a question that hardly needed asking. Back Arshavin came against Sweden in Innsbruck to produce a man-of-the-match performance that included the decisive goal in Russia's 2-0 victory.

Early on Arshavin, playing off strike partner Roman Pavlyuchenko, won a series of free-kicks by dropping into the hole, receiving and drawing the foul. Looking from a distance like Nick Barmby and standing only 5ft 7in, Arshavin plays in similar darting bursts to the former Liverpool and England midfielder. But where the Russian differs is in a willingness to try the odd dribble. One telling run last

night came from his position between the Dutch defence and midfield after eight minutes when he shrugged off the formidably sized Orlando Engelaar before flipping a pass out to Ivan Saenko on the right. After 27 minutes Arshavin again clashed with Engelaar, but this attempt ended with a pass straight out.

Throughout the match, Russia shaded possession and mounted the far greater attacks on Edwin

van der Sar's goal, thanks in the main to Arshavin's prompting. One came from a fine moment of individual skill. After his team broke quickly from a Dutch attack, Arshavin was found by Konstantin Zyryanov in the inside left channel. A run and twin body swerves opened up Andre Ooijer before Arshavin's curled shot needed a superb save from Van der Sar. The two same players combined minutes later when, after Zyryanov's

reverse pass found Arshavin in a position a little farther wide on the left, he proved he can use that same foot with a cross that required a teammate to make a late run inside the Dutch area.

Within 10 minutes of the restart Russia had the lead through Pavlyuchenko. The chance that created the goal did not, for once, feature Arshavin, but it again followed him forcing the game at Holland. First he might have had a penalty when a burst into the area had him bundled over. Referee Lubos Michel said no to that one and Arshavin was then unlucky with a bending free-kick from a difficult angle out wide on the left that flirted with Van der Sar's post.

Arshavin's disappointed shake of the head 10 minutes from time again came because teammates - in common with the opposition for most of the evening - had not kept pace. This time, his run down the left had the Dutch defence backpedalling until he had travelled from near half-way to inside their area. Once more, he delivered a difficult ball that zipped across Van der Sar's goal. But once more the little man had no support.

Arshavin was a key member of the side who won Zenit their first UEFA Cup in May, creating the opening goal in another 2-0 win - this time over Rangers. He also helped the club to the league title in 2007 - their first since 194 and the Soviet League days.

If Arshavin does leave Russia and Zenit - and it seems now more than likely - there are thought to be a host of clubs from Italy, Spain, France, Germany and England interested. In the Premier League, Arsenal are thought to be interested and there has even been talk of him moving to Barcelona. There will probably be a lot more interest after a display that must have taken Arshavin's value to around the £12 million mark. Advocaat may well be smiling over the next few weeks.



PHOTO: AFP

SHI Russian superstar Andrei Arshavin celebrates after scoring the third goal against the Netherlands during their Euro 2008 Championship quarterfinal at St. Jakob-Park in Basel on Saturday.

Citizenship for Hiddink

AFP, Brest

Russia's Dutch coach Guus Hiddink could be offered Russian citizenship after he guided the national side into the Euro 2008 semifinals, according to Russia president Dmitri Medvedev on Sunday.

The 61-year-old Dutchman propelled the Russians into the last four at the expense of his compatriots on Saturday, and Medvedev said that should he want to he could become Russian.

Medvedev was replying to a question from a World War II veteran, who congratulated the Russian president on Russia's success but wondered whether it would be safe for Hiddink to return to his country of birth.

"He doesn't need to go back, we can bestow on him Russian citizenship," replied Medvedev, who succeeded Vladimir Putin earlier this year.

Medvedev was meeting with his Belarus counterpart, authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko, and to attend a ceremony marking the 67th anniversary of the Nazi invasion.

The city of Brest was on the frontline of the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, by the German Nazi army.

Germans taking Turks seriously

AFP, Berlin

Three-time champions Germany will not be taking Turkey for granted in their Euro 2008 semifinal on Wednesday, German captain Michael Ballack said on Sunday.

The 31-year-old told Sunday newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung that while the title remained the Germans' target - which would be their first piece of silverware in 12 years since Germany beat Czech Republic in Euro '96 - they would be foolish to think that their place in the final was already assured.

"I don't like to talk about the title and it would be a great error to already be thinking about the final, because the adversary is Turkey and not Italy," said Ballack, who has scored twice already taking his total to 38 goals in 85 international appearances.

"But our goal is very clear: we want to be European champions."

"We cannot say that we are superior in terms of play and tactics to the Turks."

"It is up to us to reach the final, but as the Turkish side are unpredictable, it is hard to know how to approach this match," added the Chelsea midfielder, who scored in the 2002 World Cup semifinal against South Korea but was suspended for the final.

Turkey have been the comeback kings of the tournament, only having led for two minutes in their four matches to date.

They beat Switzerland in the last minute, scored three times in the final 15 minutes to come from 2-0 down to beat the Czechs 3-2 and levelled against Croatia with the last kick of the quarterfinal - and then won the penalty shootout.

Russians ecstatic

AFP, Moscow

Hundreds of thousands poured out into the streets all over Russia early Sunday to a cacophony of honking and shouting as news came in of Russia's historic Euro 2008 quarterfinal win over the Netherlands.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev congratulated the Russian team on the win, saying that "it was a magnificent game and a magnificent victory," the Kremlin press service said.

Fans all over Russia echoed the sentiment - in Moscow alone, over 700,000 people ran out into the night to hug passers-by, shoot fireworks and honk horns well into morning, police officials said.

"There are no violations

reported, police fully understand our fans and only ask them not to block the roads," a Moscow police spokesman said as quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency, adding that no one drunk or unruly disrupted the impromptu festivities. In Russia's second city of Saint Petersburg, the dancing crowds toasted all three players that scored the goals that secured Russia's victory, particularly Andrei Arshavin, who is a native of the former Imperial capital.

Some 10,000 fans in the Siberian city of Tomsk thronged in the central square to watch the game live on huge screens set up by the city's authorities, spraying each other with champagne each time the Russian team scored.

In the Pacific port of

Vladivostok, even bookmakers rejoiced at the victory, saying that three fourths of all fans placed their bets on the Russian team.

"Only one fourth bet on Holland in a bid to make a bit of money - but they lost, lost!" the owner of one bookmaking office said as quoted by RIA Novosti.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, this is the first time Russia have made the knock-out stages of a major tournament and will contest next Thursday's semifinal in Vienna.

Russia opened their Euro 2008 campaign with a 4-1 hammering at the hands of Spain as David Villa hit a hat-trick, but the Russians hit back with a 1-0 win over Greece and were impressive in their 2-0 win over Sweden.

Netherlands are hurting

AFP, Basel

Disappointed Dutchman Arjen Robben admits the Holland team are hurting from their shock 3-1 defeat by Russia in Saturday's Euro 2008 quarterfinal and says it will take time to get over it.

Real Madrid winger Robben sat out the game in Basel with a groin strain and could only watch in disbelief as the Russians scored two goals deep into extra-time to send Holland home.

In the build-up to the last eight clash, Marco van Basten's Dutch team had put both 2006 World Cup finalists France and Italy to the sword in their Group C campaign and had widely been regarded as the form side of the tournament.

But they came unstuck against

the hard-working Russians' with man-of-the-match midfielder Andrei Arshavin outstanding.

A second-half goal by forward Roman Pavlyuchenko gave the Russians the advantage, but Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy headed home with four minutes left to take the match into extra-time.

Zenit St Petersburg midfielder Arshavin then floated in a pinpoint accurate cross for substitute Dmitri Torbinski to stab home in the second period of injury time before the 27-year-old scored himself to kill off the Dutch.

But for Robben it was hard to admit his Dutch side had been soundly defeated.

"Russia were the justified win-

ners," he said. "It's amazing that a Dutch team with so much quality can get beaten. It's a difficult night for us. It's a sad story."

And burly midfielder Orlando Engelaar was equally dejected.

"We blew the European Championships. It's going to take a while for this to settle in."

Veteran Giovanni van Bronckhorst said the Dutch simply did not have the power to see off the Russians as Holland's Euro 2008 title aspirations lay in tatters. "They played really well and we didn't have the best of games," said the 33-year-old former Rangers and Arsenal star.

"On the night Russia deserved to go through."

"I can't explain it. It's very hard. We had the feeling in this tournament that things were going well but in football you never know."

"You can play well against Italy or France and then go out against Russia. We couldn't play the way we normally do."

"We didn't have the power to overcome them. I think Russia did very well."

For Manchester United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar, who was playing his last game of a European Championships, the Dutch could simply not match the levels they had shown in their impressive wins over France and Italy.

"I think we had a great tournament and unfortunately we couldn't get the level of play that we did in the first two games," said the shot-stopper.

"You have one bad game in the knockout stages and you are out."

"That's the way it is. Russia did very well against us."

"They are a very good side and they have a great chance now."

"They are in the semifinals - they are of four potential champions so they have a great chance."



PHOTO: AFP

A dumbfounded Dutch fan sits in the empty stands after the Netherlands exited from the Euro 2008 in Basel on Saturday.

Keeper to play in outfield

AFP, Vienna

Turkey are so decimated by injury and suspension ahead of Wednesday's Euro 2008 semifinal against Germany they may resort to playing reserve keeper Tolga Zengin as an outfield player, according to coach Fatih Terim.

"He could come on towards the end as a sub as last man (in defence) or a centre forward," Terim said.

"We can't allow ourselves the luxury of players choosing where they want to play," said Terim, who has nine of his squad unavailable.

But he is not worried about facing the three-times champions.

"We have shown several times already that we can achieve the impossible. I have faith in my team and in our ability to reach the

final," said the man nicknamed "The Emperor."

Turkey's delight at reaching their first European championship semi-final took a big blow on Saturday when it was revealed their talismanic striker and caretaker captain Nihat Kahveci was extremely doubtful for Wednesday's clash.

The 28-year-old - scorer of two goals in the 3-2 win over the Czech Republic in their final group game but who largely ploughed a thankless lonely furrow in the quarterfinal against Croatia - has a groin injury which forced him off towards the end of extra-time on Friday.

Goalkeeper Volkan Demirel is already suspended, though the Turks have an appeal pending over

his two match suspension, as are defender Emre Asik, and midfielder Tuncay Sanli and the influential Arda Turan.

Defender Emre Gungor has already been ruled out of the rest of the tournament through injury while there are injury doubts over regular captain Emre Belozoglu, key defender Servet Cetin and Turner Metin.

UEFA rules prevent Turkey, who finished third at the 2002 World Cup, from bringing in any fresh players.

German sports news agency SID quoted UEFA spokesman William Gaillard as saying Sunday that the tournament rules were clear at the start of the tournament and "we do not intend to change them during the tournament."

He confirmed that a replacement could only be called upon if a player was injured before his team's opening game.

But there was a notable exception 12 years ago, when the game's European governing body allowed the Germans themselves to bring in Jens Todt with the German squad bereft of six players through injury and suspension for the final against the Czech Republic.

UEFA accepted that the shortage of players meant that then coach Bert Vogts would likely have to list his reserve goalkeepers Oliver Kahn and Oliver Reck as outfielders.

The Germans won 2-1 as Oliver Bierhoff, now assistant to current coach Joachim Loew, netted a golden goal.