Spain eye history

AFP, Vienna

Spain will head into Sunday's Euro confident that they have overcome often dogged them in the past.

quickly on from the bounding hope that preceded them - had become so synonymous with the Spanish national team that the phrase 'perennial underachievers' became an almost permanent prefix to the word 'Spain'.

been 24 years since Spain progressed beyond the quarterfinals of a competition and yet they nervy penalty shoot-out victory in the second round. over world champions Italy in the last eight here in Vienna.

After a slightly cagey first half against Russia, Spain opened up after the break to let their football flow and they are finally looking like the team they have always threatened to be.

Now their footballing redemption would be complete if they can take that final step and beat a team that has always been the virtual antithesis of the Spaniards.

While Spain have often flattered to deceive at big tournaments, Germany frequently scrap and bully their way further than they seem to merit, such as in 2002 when one of the worst German teams in living memory reached Real Madrid. the World Cup final.

shedding their unwanted tag, Germany show no signs of parting

from their traditions. While it is true to say they played nament and that could be a fac-

well in their opening match against Poland, since then they have been clearly second best against both 2008 final against Germany here Croatia and Turkey, then outplayed Portugal thanks to a brilliant stratthe mental fragility that has so egy devised by coach Joachim Loew which saw him outthink Luiz Footballing failures - following Felipe Scolari and were uninspiring against Austria.

> And yet, as they often do, they will line up in the final with only a brave man betting against them.

But Spain coach Luis Aragones believes that his team have now developed the mental strength to Before this tournament it had make their superior ball skills tell against the Germans, insisting that they have learnt from their World Cup disappointment of two banished that hoodoo with a years ago when France beat them

"This team has been strong mentally for a long time. We played in the World Cup and that's where we learnt a lot about being strong," said the 69-year-old.

"I've always told my team that to play good football they need to compete and they need to learn the hard way but they are learning all the time.

"Players like Cesc (Fabregas) is 21 and we have other players aged 21, 22, 23 and yet they have the experience of 28-year-olds."

Germany defender Christophe Metzelder is not so sure Spain have completely overcome the demons of their past, though, and he should know as he plays for

"I know the Spanish have real David Villa is out of the final. And although Spain may be respect for us, but there is a selfinflicted trauma in the team, it has taken them decades to move beyond the quarterfinal of a tour-

tor," he said.

"They will respect that, but this is a big game and big games have a different set of laws."

And Aragones is wary about the Germans, insisting that it won't be easy repeating their performance against Russia.

"I don't know whether they (Germany) will let us play that way. If they know where to put pressure on us and how to hurt us they may not allow us to play that way again.

"But it's very hard for a team to stop us when we move the ball around quickly, they get tired."

It's not just Spain concentrating on the mental aspect of this game, though, as Germany team manager Oliver Bierhoff, who scored the winning goal the last time his country won a title, with a golden goal in the 1996 European Championships, said his team also need to overcome certain obstacles.

"The players need to approach the final in a positive mental state without fear," said Bierhoff.

"Against Croatia, Turkey and Austria, the players were nervous and almost cramped up through fear of losing to a so-called 'minor nation'.

"Hopefully they can now be liberated against Spain and play the way we know they can."

Spain are likely to switch from the 4-4-2 system they have used so effectively until now as striker

That means they may go for the five-man midfield that worked so well against Russia when Villa came off to be replaced by midfielder Fabregas.



STAR GRAPHICS

Villa will miss final

AFP, Vienna

Spain striker David Villa, who injured his leg against Russia, will definitely miss Sunday's Euro 2008 final against Germany in Vienna, the country's football federation said.

The team doctor had confirmed in Vienna at the end of Friday afternoon that Villa would almost certainly be out of the final but that he would do his very best to get him fit.

The federation said on their internet site on Friday night however: "Valencia striker David Villa, the top scorer at Euro 2008, is definitely out of Sunday's final." No

further details were given. Earlier on Friday, the federation confirmed that striker David Villa had a "slight thigh muscle strain" which would likely force him to

miss the final. "It is a small thigh strain," the Federation said in a statement after Villa, still tournament top scorer with four goals, had a scan at midfielder Xabi Alonso.

Marca quoted Villa as saying: "Now I am going to have to enjoy (the final) from the sidelines. To force

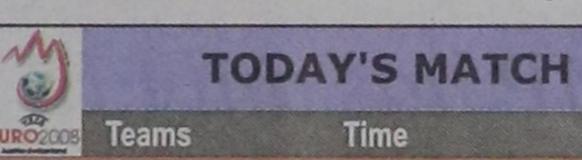
as far as to play even with an injury others who will do better at 100 per cent fitness," he conceded.

minutes of the 3-0 semifinal win over Russia and gave way to Cesc occasion," Alonso said. Fabregas, said he had suffered the injury earlier on in a sprint for a

myself would be stupid. I would go Whoever comes off the bench is very important. It's a shame, but this is a team effort. There are though, that he will not be able to play the final, as he's been an integral part of things.

Villa, who went off after 34 ... "I hope we can go on to lift the cup and he can participate in the

Dani Guiza, who scored the second goal in the semifinal win over Russia, is the natural replacement for Villa's teammates lamented his Villa, whom he regards as an "impor-



misfortune but said it would not affect the Spanish challenge.

ipain v Germany

"I think it will be difficult for him to be okay for the final. But we have different options," said Liverpool

"We have enough cover for him and it will not be a big prob-

"That's one of the keys with us we have different possibilities. Guiza.

12:45am (Monday) Vienna tant piece of the jigsaw. He's shown

that throughout the Euros.

"It's a shame - but we have to keep going. The final is an important game but we have more players available," said the top scorer or 'pichichi' in La Liga with Mallorca in the season just ended.

Venue

"I don't know if I'll play the final - the coach will decide," added

Road to final

AFP, Vienna

Paths to the Euro 2008 final on Sunday in Vienna: GERMANY - champions in 1972

1980, 1996 Group phase: beat Poland 2-0, lost 2-1 to Croatia, beat Austria 1-0 Quarterfinals: beat Portugal 3-2 Semifinal: beat Turkey 3-2 SPAIN - champions in 1964 Group phase: beat Russia 4-1, beat Sweden 2-1, beat Greece 2-1 Quarterfinals: beat Italy 4-2 on

penalties following a goalless draw Semifinal: beat Russia 3-0 Spain-Germany

recent matches AFP, Vienna

Recent encounters between Euro 2008 finalists Germany and Spain, who meet in Sunday's trophy game in Vienna with the Germans to date having won eight of 19 meetings overall and Spain five with six games drawn:

Last ten meetings: 12/02/2003 at Palma de Mallorca: Spain 3 Germany 1 (friendly)

16/00/2000 at Hannover: Germany 4 Spain 1 (friendly) 22/02/1995 at Jerez: Spain 0 Germany 0 (friendly)

21/06/1994 at Chicago: Germany 1 Spain 1 (WC 1994) 17/08/1988 at Munich: Germany 2

Spain 0 (Euro 1988) 15/10/1986 at Hannover: Germany 2 Spain 2 (friendly) 20/06/1984 at Paris: Spain

Germany 0 (Euro 1984) 02/07/1982 at Madrid: Spain Germany 2 (WC 1982) 22/05/1976 at Munich: Germany 2 Spain 0 (Euro 1976)

24/04/1975 at Madrid: Spain 1 Germany 1 (Euro 1976)

Guus amazed by reception

MEP, Moscow

Russia football coach Guus Hiddink was amazed at the reception his team received here on Friday after returning to the country following the exploits at the Euro 2008 champi onships in Switzerland and Austria.

Hiddink, who led Russia to the semifinals where they lost 3-O to Spain on Thursday night, said: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are very amazed that you have all come here to Luzhniki stadium to honour our boys and I think we can be very proud of you because you are very committed to this team you have enjoyed the team.

"And we are very proud and I'm very proud that I've been working with these guys. Give them a big hand, they deserve it."

Then the best moments of Russia at Euro 2008 were transmitted on giant screens to the crowds at the stadium. The Soviet Union team reached

the 1988 final, losing to a Ruud Gullit and Marco van Basten-inspired Holland, but this was Russia's best performance since the fall of the iron curtain a year later.

Best player undecided

REUTERS, Vienna

It is not just the Henri Delaunay trophy up for grabs in Sunday's Euro 2008 final as just about any stand-out individual performance by a Spaniard or German could secure him UEFA's Player of the Tournament award.

Oddly, in a championship that has produced so many great games and dramatic moments, there are few obvious candidates for the honour being announced by organisers on Monday.

Should Germany triumph, tation of a victorious teamethic. captain Michael Ballack would be a major contender. The midfielder was solid in the group phase, superb in the 3-2 quarterfinal win over Portugal in a more advanced role and, though he had a game to forget against Turkey in the semis, he will expect to be at his best in the

Ballack revels in big games and knows he is the focal point of the team. Having missed the 2002 World Cup final through suspension and lost in two Champions League finals he has a point to prove and what better place to do it than the European Championship final, perhaps with a decisive late

Teammate Bastian Schweinsteiger has quickly developed from a substitute in the first two group games into a key part of Germany's midfield. He scored the first goal and set up the other two in the victory over Portugal and scored again in an excellent performance against Turkey.

His harsh red card for shoving Jerko Leko in the Croatia group match could count against him in another clean sheet on Sunday. UEFA's eyes, however.

Germany's third contender,

Lukas Podolski, is going for an individual double after being named the best young player of the 2006World Cup. Transformed from striker to

A graphic shows the probable starting eleven of Spain and Germany. They will fight for glory in the Euro 2008 final at the Ernst Happel Stadium in Vienna today.

attacking midfielder, he has scored at Euro 2008. Greece captain Theo Zagorakis

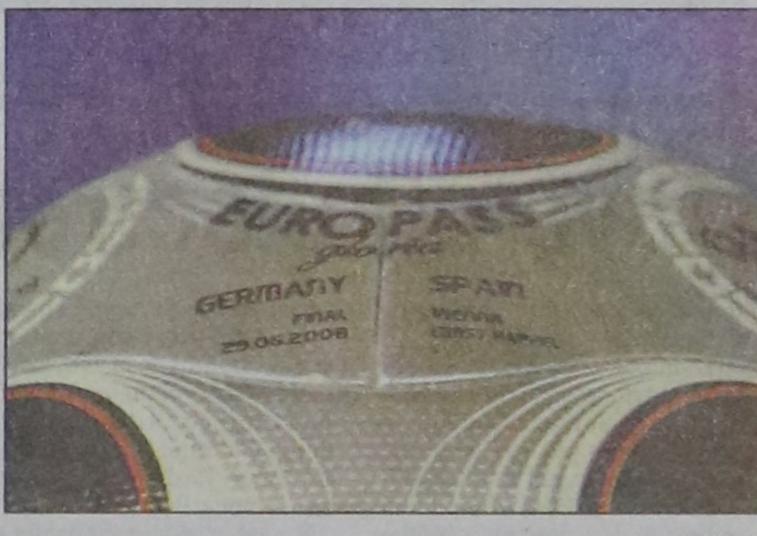
got the 2004 award and though he had been consistently solid, it was seen by many as more of a represen-With Spain's advance also based

on an all-round team effort, captain Iker Casillas could be in with a shout, especially if he keeps

-The big goalkeeper has not put a foot wrong so far and saved two penalties in the quarterfinal shoot-

out win over Italy. There is still time for Spain's Cesc Fabregas to make a late run, despite mainly featuring as a substitute to date. If, as expected, he three goals and laid on two others starts on Sunday then a repeat of his semifinal performance against

Russia could bring him the honour. Outside the two finalists, Russia's Andrei Arshavin caught the eye with inventive displays against Sweden and Netherlands but he was unable to impose himself against Spain in the semis and is unlikely to collect an individual consolation.



The official ball for the Euro 2008 final between Germany and Spain is presented during a press conference at the Ernst Happel Stadium in Vienna on Saturday.

Spaniards rush for Vienna

AFP, Madrid

Spanish travel agents were inundated on Friday with requests from Spaniards desperate to get to Vienna for Sunday's Euro 20008 final against Germany.

umph to date having come in the 1964 championships this year's run to the final - their first trophy match since a 1984 loss to France has engendered frenetic interest.

With Spain's only major tri-

"We have had a huge amount of demand" for trips to the Austrian capital, a spokeswoman for the Marsans travel operator, one of

Spain's largest, told AFP. "Our offer of a return flight plus match ticket for around 1,500 euros, which we put on sale this morning, was sold out by 11 a.m.,"

the spokeswoman said. National air carrier Iberia told a similar story.

"Demand has been strong. We chartered six more planes for a total of 1,236 places at the behest of travel agencies," a spokesman said.

Ljungberg quits int'l football

AFP, Stockholm

Sweden captain Fredrik Ljungberg has announced his retirement from international football, the country's TT agency reported on Friday.

The 31-year-old former Arsenal midfielder said it was becoming physically too difficult to play for both West Ham and the national team. Ljungberg played his first match for his country back in 1998.

Brazilian taste to finale

AFP, Vienna

No South American has ever picked up a winner's medal in the European Championships - but that will change on Sunday when either Marcos Senna tastes glory with Spain or Germany's Kevin Kuranyi shares in a win for Die Mannschaft.

Both men, Brazilian-born, have brought a samba taste to the event, particularly Senna, who has been a mainstay of a swashbuckling Spanish team whereas Kuranyi has had to watch from the bench with Polish-born duo Miroslav Klose and Lukas Podolski on German

goalscoring form. Senna was outstanding in Spain's 3-0 semifinal win over Russia as the holding midfield player effectively in the French city of Rouen. shackled Andrei Arshavin, who had lit up the tournament in his two previous outings but was rendered

totally anonymous. Such was the Spanish dominance with whom he won the World Club that it seemed it was more than their unusual yellow 'away' shirts that Luis Aragones' men had in common with the 'auriverde' of Brazil.

With the Brazilians currently

limping along the World Cup road wonder what might have been.

But having taken out Spanish nationality in early 2006 - in time for the last World Cup - he is now very much the great gain of Spain with his semi-showing and penalty conversion against Italy in the quarters. Senna was born in Sao Paulo in

1976, while Germany's Kuranyi hails from Petropolis in Rio de Janeiro state, born there in 1982. Both men will therefore vie for the title of first Brazilian European

champion in Sunday's showdown Argentine origin did lift the title, scoring in the Euro 2000 final win over Italy - but he was actually born

Senna's samba roots go deeper than those of Kuranyi - at least in footballing terms. He played for Rio Branco, America and Corinthians, Championship in 2000, before spells with Juventude and Sao Caetano. He then joined Villarreal Juventus are interested - they are a in 2001 and was La Liga runner-up big name in world football." in the season just ended.

while his mother is from Panama. nationality.

He grew up in South America Koeman. and came to Germany in his midteens, joining VfB Stuttgart in the Bundesliga in 2000 before moving on to Schalke three seasons ago.

come. for me as no Brazilian has ever had the chance of playing in a Euro final. I hope I can make the most of David Trezeguet of France but of this opportunity and win the title,

Senna told reporters. His fine showings for Spain have sparked a surge of interest from Italian clubs - but Manchester United had also already noted his

talent last year. For now, however, he is concentrating only on Spain, having said before the semifinal that "I want to focus on the game against Russia, though I am happy to know

Aragones was in two minds

Kuranyi qualified to play for the initially about going with Senna or to South Africa 2010 Senna could Germans on account of his Xabi Alonso in the holding role German father of Hungarian origin having not called up one of his earlier favourites, David Albelda, He has joint German-Panamanian after the latter was frozen out at Valencia by then coach Ronald

The 31-year-old Senna came to Villarreal six years ago by chance as the club were scouting a striker at then club Sao Caetano. When the Senna cannot wait for Sunday to scouts saw him they snapped him up and at the last World Cup he "It will be a really special match became the first Brazilian to play for Spain at the event.

Kuranyi, despite 19 goals in the national shirt has yet to convince coach Joachim Loew that he should start in place of Klose and Podolski with Mario Gomez, a Spanish-German, also in the queueaheadofhim.

Kuranyi played well at the 2005 Confederations Cup but then coach Jurgen Klinsmann dropped him for the 2006 World Cup despite good form in the qualifiers.

But even a place on the bench would see him beat Senna to the accolade of first South American European champion if the Germans can win the contest.



EURO2008

Vienna's AKH hospital. Earlier, Spanish sports daily **EURO 2008 BRIEFS**

Euro 2008 briefs on Friday:

AFP, Vienna

MOTIVATION TENERO: Germany coach Joachim Loew used a secret weapon to spur his team on ahead of Wednesday's semifinal against Turkey: the everreliable 12th man. In a creative move, "Jogi" played a three-minute film for his players, showing scenes of jubilation around Germany after their quarterfinal win again Portugal. And it apparently worked: the Mannschaft defeated the Turks 3-2. As a special thank you to their loyal fans, the German team plan to

matter who wins the final. OUTOFTHELIMELIGHT

VIENNA: Talk about a bad week. Former Austria coach Josef Hickersberger not only saw his team eliminated from Euro 2008 in the group stages, he also received a 50-euro fine a few days later after he was caught speaking on his mobile phone while driving... only shortly after he had announced his resignation as team chief. PARTYON

On the last weekend of the tournament, the Swiss capital will hold several free concerts on the square in front of the Federal Palace.

expected to attend.

FROM RUSSIA, WITH LOVE VIENNA: Russian fans in town for their country's semifinal against Spain on Thursday did much more than just go to the stadium. A major silverware shop in central Vienna saw such an onslaught of clients that it almost ran out of stock. "We were out of caviar sets the whole day," a sales assistant told Austrian television.



PHOTO: AFP Russian star footballer Andrei Arshavin walks past a military band and cheering fans upon the team's arrival in Moscow on Friday.