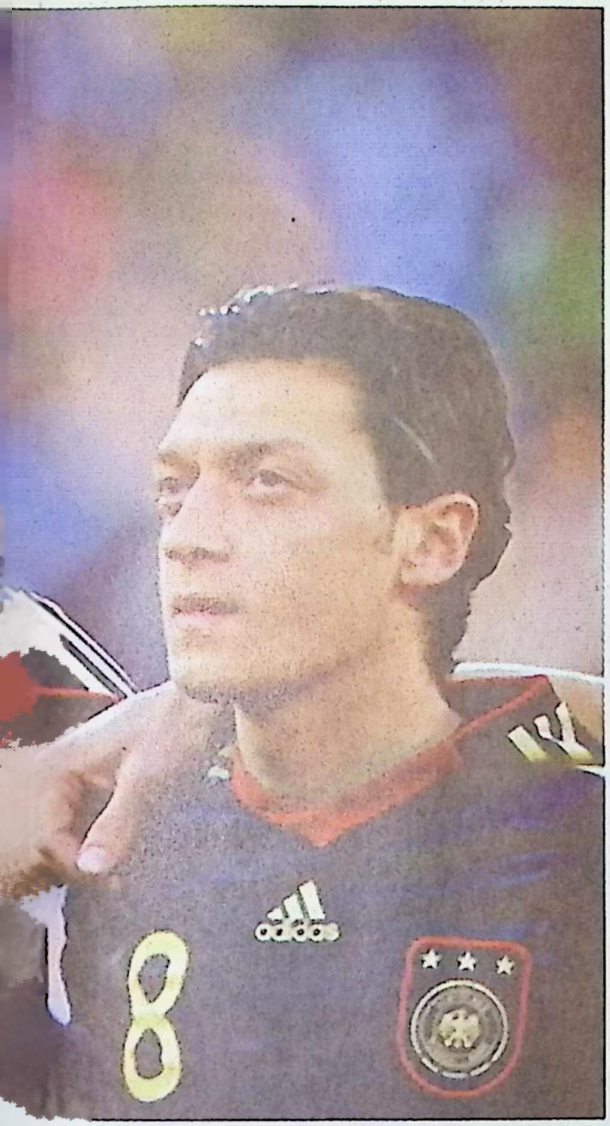


IT is June 11, 2008, a Wednesday, and the rain is absolutely pouring down in the Swiss city of Basel. Grey clouds swirl ominously above and beyond the open roof of St. Jakob Park stadium where supporters find every little bit of shelter that they can. Out on the pitch, however, hosts Switzerland are playing Turkey in a winner-take-all clash. This final game in Group A would determine who would make the quarterfinals of Euro 2008.

Thus, despite the torrential downpour, the support is overwhelming and the action no-holds-barred. More importantly, given the circumstances, the tension is thick enough to slice with a knife. And there are the afters. The last time these two teams clashed back in 2006, the match ended in a mass brawl between the two sets of players.

All this, sets up the game perfectly.

At the start, the weight of expectations seems to be playing on the Swiss, who put in a lacklustre display. Turkey, buoyed on by the quest for revenge look more assured.

But out of nowhere, Erin Derdiyok beats the offside trap and squares for Hakan Yakin to score. Switzerland are one up and the tension is somewhat alleviated.

Minutes later the two combine again and Derdiyok puts Yakin through again. This time, however, Yakin inexplicably misses an open goal. On the replays it looks easier for him to score. But somehow he flicks it wide.

The crowd is aghast and cannot believe it. But a select few shake their heads knowingly in a manner that suggests they expected nothing else. And the nods soon morph into full-fledged insults when, a few minutes later, Valon Behrami also contrives to miss the easiest of opportunities. It is all downhill from there. The rest of night descends into a series of catcalls and screams and it is no surprise then when the Swiss crash out to two late goals from a spirited Turkey side.

The Swiss fans curse their luck and the weather which made conditions unplayable but the biggest retribution is saved for Yakin and many accuse him of intentionally missing an open goal.

The reason?

Yakin is ethnically Turkish. So is Derdiyok. And in the eyes of the Swiss fans, they were basically playing against their "own country". Most cannot seemingly shake off the lingering feeling that Yakin, whose mother wanted her son to play for Turkey rather than Switzerland, decided to do his country of origin a "favour".

It is a jingoistic allegation and one that has no basis on facts but try telling that to the masses who lay the blame for their exit solely on the shoulders of Yakin.

But what of Valon Behrami? He too missed a golden opportunity. This only gives fuel to their fire. Behrami may be turning out for the Swiss, they claim, but everyone knows he is originally a refugee from Kosovo.

In truth, all these claims are absolutely nonsense. Yakin would no more have missed the open goal, than he would have sold his mother out. And he is no more Turkish, than Barack Obama is Kenyan. Yakin was born in Basel and he grew up in Münchenstein, a town along the French and German border. He is a Swiss resident and citizen and has played all but one of