

Preciado dies of heart attack

Spanish coach Manuel Preciado died of a heart attack on Thursday, just a day after he was named the new coach at relegated side Villarreal, his former side Sporting Gijon said.

"A heart attack claimed the life of Manuel Preciado in the early hours in Valencia," the club said in a statement.

"Villarreal want to express their deepest sorrow at the sad loss and want to offer their condolences to his family and all his relatives," the club Preciado was set to join added.

Preciado, 54, had been due to be officially unveiled as Villarreal's new coach on Friday.

He coached Racing Santander in the 2002-03 season and was in charge of Levante the following season, when he led them to the first division.

Ribery not amused

French playmaker Franck Ribery had a sense of humour failure here on Thursday when he was asked what he thought of UEFA president Michel Platini's joke that France could win the Euro 2012 title if they got off the bus.

Platini's remark at his press conference on Wednesday was in reference to the French debacle at the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa which reached its nadir when the squad went on strike in protest at the expulsion of Nicolas Anelka and stayed on the bus.

However, Ribery, who was one of the senior players in that squad, did not evidently find the remark amusing and even less so to be asked his reaction to it.

"You think I want to answer that question?", he replied frowning at the questioner.

"I have no desire to answer this question."

His team-mate and fellow squad member from 2010 Mathieu Valbuena also refused to answer the question.



Czech Republic star Tomas Rosicky (L) and defender Michal Kadlec warm up during a training session in Wroclaw on Thursday ahead of their Euro 2012 opening match against Russia. PHOTO: AFP

Testicle-biting dogs for hooligans

From testicle-biting police dogs to sonic cannons capable of inducing involuntary urination, Polish anti-hooligan squads have an array of weapons ready for potential trouble-makers at Euro 2012.

The English-language Krakow Post newspaper asserted in an editorial that local law enforcement agencies were more than ready to tackle any hooligan threat at England's southern Poland base camp.

"The Polish police are going to come down on troublemakers like a bag full of anvils and you don't want to be there when it happens," the paper warned.

"Krakow has a long history of hooligan violence -- the local police have seen it all before and they will ruin your day if you try it on."

"These lads' mums and dads rioted under Soviet machine guns -- a few chairs thrown by beered-up fans is not going to intimidate them."

"Do not expect softly, softly police tactics."

Point to prove

REUTERS, Wroclaw

The Czech Republic will draw on memories of impressive runs at past tournaments while Russia are looking to show their semifinal appearance in 2008 was no fluke when they clash in their Euro 2012 Group A opener in Wroclaw on Friday.

The Czechs, who lost to Germany in the Euro 1996 final and reached the semifinals in 2004, are determined to re-establish themselves as a force in European football after slipping to 26 in the FIFA world rankings.

With a mix of experienced players led by Arsenal's Tomas Rosicky and Chelsea's Petr Cech, along with a raft of newcomers, the Czechs are optimistic of at least progressing from what should be a tightly-contested group also featuring co-hosts Poland and Greece.

"All the teams will think they have a chance to qualify for the quarterfinals," Czech national team manager Vladimir Smicer said. "The really important match for us will be the first game against Russia. They are the favourites in our group."

The Russians are unbeaten in 14 matches and thrashed Italy 3-0 in a Euro warm-up last Friday.

Despite a sluggish start to the qualifiers which included a laboured 2-0 win over tiny Andorra and a 1-0 home defeat to Slovakia, Russia comfortably sealed their place at this year's finals by finishing top of qualifying Group B.

Russia rarely produced the attacking flair that made them look so attractive in Austria and Switzerland in 2008 but they were defensively sound, conceding only four goals in their 10 matches.

CZECH REP **RUSSIA**

Match Played: 1 Draw

Arshavin eyes repeat

AFP, Warsaw

Should Russia repeat their run of four years ago and reach the Euro semifinals that would be counted as a success said national captain and playmaker Andrei Arshavin.

The 31-year-old - who looks to have returned to form after going back to Zenit Saint Petersburg on loan from Arsenal earlier this year - was one of the stars of Euro 2008.

"I'd say that we should really repeat the level of our Euro achievement last time. In case we manage to reach the semifinal round of the event we all can count it a success," he said.

"First, it will be great to repeat our 2008 performance. But we know we will definitely need to beat some of the event's hotter favourites to achieve it."

The Russians - who last reached the final in 1988 as the then Soviet Union and lost to the Dutch - open their campaign against the Czech Republic on Friday in Wroclaw in Group A.

However, Arshavin said that their recent 3-0 win over Italy in a friendly had given the squad the shot in the arm it needed going into the tournament.

"The result of the friendly match with Italy boosted our fans' hopes ahead of the championship's start and all of our players also," said Arshavin.

"However, for a long time we have believed our team is capable of playing at this level."

"Many of us have gained that self-confidence even before the previous European championship. CSKA Moscow's and Zenit's UEFA Cup trophy wins (2005 for CSKA and 2008 for Zenit of which Arshavin played a leading role in the latter) boosted all of the country's players morale a great deal."

"Of course we suffered a serious blow when we failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup but we managed to get back our self-confidence during the European championship qualifying campaign finishing top of our group."

Arshavin also said that he considered all four teams in the group - co-hosts Poland and Euro 2004 champions Greece are the others - to be almost even in ability and predicted tough competition for the two quarterfinal places on offer.

THE EURO 2012 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

<p>GROUP A</p> <p>POLAND Record: 2nd participation Coach: Franciszek Smuda FIFA ranking: 65</p> <p>GREECE Record: 4th participation, Winner (2004) Coach: Fernando Santos FIFA ranking: 14</p> <p>RUSSIA Record: 11th participation Winner (1960) Coach: Dick Advocaat FIFA ranking: 11</p> <p>CZECH REP Record: 8th participation Winner (1976) Coach: Michal Bilek FIFA ranking: 26</p>	<p>Friday, June 8 Warsaw, Group A: Poland v Greece (10pm) Wroclaw, Group A: Russia v Czech Republic (1245am, June 9)</p> <p>Saturday, June 9 Kharkiv, Group B: Holland v Denmark (10pm) Lviv, Group B: Germany v Portugal (1245am, June 10)</p> <p>Sunday, June 10 Gdansk, Group C: Spain v Italy (10pm) Poznan, Group C: Rep of Ireland v Croatia (1245am, June 11)</p>	<p>Monday, June 11 Donetsk, Group D: France v England (10pm) Kiev, Group D: Ukraine v Sweden (1245am, June 12)</p> <p>Tuesday, June 12 Wroclaw, Group A: Greece v Czech Republic (10pm) Warsaw, Group A: Poland v Russia (1245am, June 13)</p> <p>Wednesday, June 13 Lviv, Group B: Denmark v Portugal (10pm) Kharkiv, Group B: Holland v Germany (1245am, June 14)</p> <p>Thursday, June 14 Poznan, Group C: Italy v Croatia (10pm)</p>	<p>Croatia (10pm) Gdansk, Group C: Spain v Republic of Ireland (1245am, June 15)</p> <p>Friday, June 15 Kiev, Group D: Sweden v England (10pm) Donetsk, Group D: Ukraine v France (1245am, June 16)</p> <p>Saturday, June 16 Wroclaw, Group A: Czech Republic v Poland (1245am, June 17) Warsaw, Group A: Greece v Russia (1245am, June 17)</p> <p>Sunday, June 17 Kharkiv, Group B: Portugal v Holland (1245am, June 18)</p>	<p>GROUP C</p> <p>SPAIN Record: 9th participation Winner (1964, 2008) Coach: Vicente Del Bosque FIFA ranking: 1</p> <p>ITALY Record: 8th participation Winner (1968) Coach: Cesar Prandelli FIFA ranking: 12</p> <p>IRELAND Record: 2nd participation Coach: Giovanni Trapattoni FIFA ranking: 18</p> <p>CROATIA Record: 4th participation Coach: Slaven Bilic FIFA ranking: 8</p>	<p>GROUP D</p> <p>UKRAINE Record: 1st participation Coach: Oleg Blokhine FIFA ranking: 50</p> <p>SWEDEN Record: 5th participation Coach: Erik Hamren FIFA ranking: 17</p> <p>FRANCE Record: 8th participation Winner (1984, 2000) Coach: Laurent Blanc FIFA ranking: 16</p> <p>ENGLAND Record: 8th participation Coach: Roy Hodgson FIFA ranking: 7</p>
<p>QUARTERFINALS</p> <p>Thursday, June 21 QF1: Warsaw: Winners A v Runners-up B (1245am, June 22)</p> <p>Friday, June 22 QF2: Gdansk: Winners B v Runners-up A (1245am, June 23)</p> <p>Saturday, June 23 QF3: Donetsk: Winners C v Runners-up D (1245am, June 24)</p> <p>Sunday, June 24 QF4: Kiev: Winners D v Runners-up C (1245am, June 25)</p>					
<p>SEMIFINALS</p> <p>Wednesday, June 27 SF1: Donetsk: Winners QF1 v Winners QF3 (1245am, June 28)</p> <p>Thursday, June 28 SF2: Warsaw: Winners QF2 v Winners QF4 (1245am, June 29)</p>					
<p>FINAL</p> <p>Sunday, July 1 Kiev: Winners SF1 v Winners SF2 (1245am, July 2)</p>					

