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Final venue...the Olympic Stadium in Kiev

The biggest show in town



GAVIN HAMILTON
Editor

The 2012 Olympics will dominate many sporting headlines this summer, but for serious football followers the biggest show in town will be the European Championship. No other event will come close.

It's commonly argued that the European Championship is harder to win than the World Cup. While the World Cup often throws up mediocre sides from outside Europe and South America, the Euros provide a more intense test, pitting the strongest teams – the likes of Spain and Italy, Holland and Germany, France and England – against each other from the very start.

Certainly, in recent times, we've seen better quality football at the Euros than at the World Cup and, hopefully, Euro 2012 will provide another such spectacle. There is, however, no way of guaranteeing that players will arrive at the competition in peak physical condition.

Favourites Spain will travel to Poland on the back of an exhausting domestic league and European campaign for their Real Madrid and Barcelona contingent, while the league which is likely to supply most players to the tournament, the English Premier League, is played at full throttle from August to May without a break.

Teething troubles

While the tournament should be remembered for events on the pitch, the problems of the first finals to be held in eastern Europe cannot be ignored. All tournaments have teething troubles, but those experienced by Euro 2012, particularly in the Ukrainian half of the competition, have been greater than at any previous event.

This will be a tournament of two halves, played across two time zones, with two currencies, two languages and vast physical



distances between the different venues.

The view to the millions watching on TV around the world will be of wonderful new stadiums. But away from the pitches, the picture may not be quite so rosy. Huge doubts remain about transport infrastructure and the availability and price of accommodation. At one stage last year it looked as if Ukraine may be stripped of host status. UEFA eventually pulled back from the brink on that threat, though president Michel Platini recently condemned Ukrainian hoteliers as "bandits and crooks" for vastly inflated prices for the duration of the tournament.

Platini, who remains the favourite to succeed Sepp Blatter as FIFA president, has staked his personal reputation on the success of Euro 2012. Awarding the hosting rights to Ukraine and Poland was political payback for the support he received in his presidential election campaign.

Largely, Platini has been a force for good in the European game, particularly with his attempts to level the playing field with regulations for financial fairplay among clubs. Yet the great irony of Ukraine's Euro 2012 preparations is that much of the funding for the stadiums and infrastructure, notably in Kharkiv and Donetsk, has come from oligarchs whose wealth has distorted the domestic football horizon.

Huge test

One huge test which UEFA must not shirk over the course of Euro 2012 is racism. Unfortunately, both host nations have fans with an unsavoury reputation for abusing black players. Europe's governing body therefore has an opportunity to demonstrate its determination to deal with the problem.

As this special edition of *World Soccer* was going to press, news emerged that the Football Association had approached Roy Hodgson with a



Champions...Spain celebrate winning the title in 2008

view to becoming England manager until the 2014 World Cup. A wise choice, one championed in these pages for a number of years. Unfortunately, the appointment was too late to include an interview with Hodgson; that will follow next month, along with further analysis of his squad.

Our next issue is published in the UK on the eve of the tournament. For those outside the UK, who have to wait for their copy of the magazine to arrive via the post, a digital/iPad edition is now available on the day of UK publication. Further details are available from the Apple Newsstand and zinio.com.

It's an exciting development for *World Soccer* and I am especially pleased that subscribers to the magazine will be able to download the iPad edition from Newsstand at no extra cost.

The July issue will then feature a complete review of the competition. In the meantime, you can follow events in Poland and Ukraine online at

worldsoccer.com and via Twitter.

As for favourites, Spain are the logical choice but no team has ever retained the European crown or won three successive international titles. Neighbours have a history of success in the Euros – Holland in West Germany in 1988, Denmark in Sweden in 1992, France in Holland/Belgium 2000 – suggesting Germany will be contenders.

Similarly, Russia will want to prove that they can go one better than the semi-finals of Euro 2008, while Holland's performance will go a long way to answering the question of whether the current generation peaked at the 2010 World Cup Final.

France and Portugal have players who have excelled in the Champions League this season – Cristiano Ronaldo for Real Madrid, Franck Ribery for Bayern – while Poland and Ukraine will want to avoid the fate of co-hosts Austria and Switzerland four years ago.

Whoever you think can win the tournament, this guide will provide you with all the information and analysis you'll need to argue your case.

Enjoy the tournament!



Staking his reputation...Platini



England approach...Hodgson



Opener...Poland's National Stadium will host the first game of the tournament

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Heads up...Croatia's Mario Mandžukić (centre) battles with Sweden's Olof Mellberg (left) and Zlatan Ibrahimović in a pre-Euros friendly

CROATIA All over for Bilic

Coach will depart after tournament, whatever happens



ZDRAVKO REIC
in Split

By qualifying for Euro 2012 via the play-offs, Croatia achieved their major aim. Anything more in Poland and Ukraine will be a bonus for a country which has now missed out on only two finals: Euro 2000 and the 2010 World Cup.

Fans in Croatia are realistic about their chances in a tough group, even if coach Slaven Bilic believes his team are capable of upsetting favourites Spain and Italy. Everything will depend on the first match against the Republic of Ireland. Victory there will give the team a boost in the second game against Italy, who have not beaten Croatia since independence.

Bilic needs all the players who starred in the qualifying campaign to be fit and a lot will depend on Luka Modric's mood. He is the one who creates and organises everything. A second key figure is striker Ivica Olic, scorer of some crucial goals, who will retire from the national team after the tournament.

Bilic's biggest problem is the defence. A lack of pace at the back means Croatia cannot play an attacking game, but instead wait to play on the counter-attack.

Off the pitch, the team could be hampered by events in their domestic game. In addition to the problems facing the Croatian league, where several clubs are struggling to stay in business, there is a leadership battle at the Croatian Football Federation (CFF), where president Vlatko Markovic is under attack amid accusations of corruption.

In this context, the national team's performances have provided a ray of sunshine amid the gloom. However, despite the success

of qualifying for Euro 2012, Bilic has been heavily criticised by the Croatian media and public. Blame for the failure to qualify for the 2010 World Cup was placed firmly on his shoulders, with accusations that he is too friendly with the players. It was argued that "Nane", as Bilic is called by his friends, no longer had any authority with the players.

When Croatia pulled off a brilliant 3-0 victory in Istanbul against Turkey in the first leg of the play-offs, many sections of the media tried to claim that a group of older players had picked the team. That was plainly not the case and Bilic deserved most credit for Croatia's place at Euro 2012.

There had been calls for his head following a 1-0 loss in Tbilisi to Georgia and a defeat by Greece. However, CFF leaders – including the key figure of Zdravko Mamic from Dinamo Zagreb – were unable to find an available replacement at short notice so Bilic survived.

Last chance of success

The coach now faces the challenge of motivating a group of players who, with the exception of those at Dinamo, are all with foreign clubs and appear to have lost interest in the national side. Six key players are aged over 30, including Josip Simunic who, like Olic, is likely to retire from the international scene after Euro 2012. On the other hand, the older players could be motivated by their last chance of international success.

Bilic is also at the end of his time with the national team, even though he has not made an official announcement. A purge of the CFF is

GROUP C

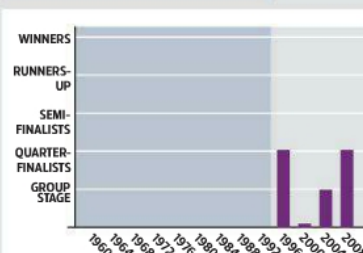
10.06.12	Republic of Ireland (Poznan, Pol)
14.06.12	Italy (Poznan, Pol)
18.06.12	Spain (Gdansk, Pol)

being prepared, prompted by new sports minister Zeljko Jovanovic, who has promised to "drain the soccer swamp". With Bilic's main supporters – president Markovic and secretary Zorislav Srebric – set to depart, he will probably pack his bags as well.

One final sign of the declining fortunes of the national side are the fans, who have followed the team in great numbers in the past but are unlikely to be in Poland. Although partly due to the recession, it also reflects their pessimism about their team's chances. **WS**

EURO RECORD

1960 to 1992 part of Yugoslavia



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP F

03.09.10	Latvia (a)	3-0
07.09.10	Greece (h)	0-0
09.10.10	Israel (a)	2-1
17.11.10	Malta (h)	3-0
26.03.11	Georgia (a)	0-1
03.06.11	Georgia (h)	2-1
02.09.11	Malta (a)	3-1
06.09.11	Israel (h)	3-1
07.10.11	Greece (a)	0-2
11.10.11	Latvia (h)	2-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	10	7	3	0	14	5	24
Croatia	10	7	1	2	18	7	22
Israel	10	5	1	4	13	11	16
Latvia	10	3	2	5	9	12	11
Georgia	10	2	4	4	7	9	10
Malta	10	0	1	9	4	21	1

Play-off

11.11.11	Turkey (a)	3-0
15.11.11	Turkey (h)	0-0

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Sweden (h)	1-3
25.05.12	Estonia (h)	
02.06.12	Norway (a)	

BASE CAMP



Slaven Bilic

“I’m being trampled on by the media but I’m proud of what I’ve achieved with the national team”

How do you rate your group?

It’s very tough, but we have a chance to reach the last eight. I’m not just saying that, it’s the reality. In any case, although it will be difficult it’s also a privilege to play against current world and European champions Spain and Italy, who have been the best in the world four times.

But Croatia, compared to Spain and Italy, will still be outsiders...

It is true, Spain are the no1 favourites, but we have to see how things unfold. I believe we can beat Ireland in the first game, in which case everything will open up. I believe that we can stand and fight on an equal footing with Italy. My memories against the *Azzurri* are positive. When I took over this team our first test was against Italy, who were fresh from becoming world champions in Germany. With a completely new team set-up we won in Livorno. I know it was a friendly match, but I’ll remind you that Italy have never beaten us.

You’re leaving after the finals. How do you assess your time in charge?

We missed our great opportunity in 2008, when we were rather unfortunately eliminated by Turkey. We just had no luck. In fact, we’ve never enjoyed any luck – in the qualifiers for South Africa, and now in the qualifying cycle for Euro 2012. Everything we have achieved has been through our quality. We’ve stood up to the strongest teams, but we must be concentrated and have a complete squad, which means no injuries.

Is there a problem with Luka Modric’s condition? He looks worn out...

Modric is our main player. We’ll have to refresh him, he’ll train under a special programme. But there is no problem, he is always motivated. He’s that special sort who wants to always prove himself. I am glad [Vedran] Corluka has changed club and immediately adapted to the Bundesliga. I am also happy for [Nikica] Jelavic, he’s made great progress in his career, from Split to Belgium, Austria, Scotland and now to the Premier League with Everton.

Some people claim you have lost your authority, that you’re too friendly with the players...

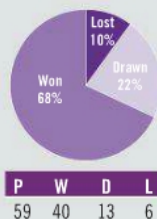
Message...Bilic gets his instructions across to captain Darijo Srna during the play-off first leg against Turkey



COACH’S RECORD



His country’s second longest-serving coach – behind Miroslav Blazevic’s 73 games – Bilic has won more games than anyone else.



No way. The moment I felt that the players were losing confidence in me, even for a single per cent, I would have left. I have seen their loyalty so many times, especially at critical moments during the Euro 2012 qualifiers.

Earlier in the season Eduardo was unhappy with his place on the bench. How are things now?

Dudu’s goals make him very important for the team, so I made an effort and went to visit him in Donetsk and we cleared up all the concerns. Eduardo is like any other player: no matter how significant he is, or regardless of his achievements in the past, he has to know that we are guided exclusively by the interests of the team as a whole.

You’ve gone from being voted Croatian of the year in 2007 to being attacked in the media. How does that feel?

It doesn’t matter to me that I’m being trampled by the media, even humiliated, but my family has found it hard to cope with such a lynching. I hope the media will have a better outlook by the start of the European Championship. I haven’t changed in the slightest. Today, I am surely a better coach than in 2006 when I started. We’ve had our crisis with results, so dissatisfaction was logical, but I haven’t asked, and didn’t get, any special treatment. I accept my responsibilities at all times, I’ve never looked for excuses.

When you took over you introduced a lot of young players who are now much more experienced. But results have been inconsistent...

In recent years, Croatia has always been among the top 10 in the FIFA rankings. That has to be proof of the value of our team. And when you look generally at our society, and when you know that Croatia has a population of only 4.5 million, and that our domestic league is weak, then you can understand my pride that the national team is so highly ranked.

Interview by Zdravko Reic

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Battling on...Modric keeps Sweden's Andreas Granqvist at bay during a friendly in Zagreb



Luka Modric

“Bilic’s contribution to the team is huge and each one of us should be grateful to him”

Slaven Bilic is in no doubt that you will be Croatia’s key player at Euro 2012 and a star of the tournament. How will that affect your future?

I will decide about my future after the Euros. More precisely, I will make my decision where to continue with my career. I’m ready for big tests. I want to prove, together with the help of my team-mates, that Croatia has the potential to reach the quarter-finals, and then we’ll see.

Before you signed for Tottenham Hotspur your career was not an easy one. How have you survived the ups and downs?

All the difficulties and troubles that have followed me don’t matter now. Ever since I came to London to play in the Premier League, everything looks like a beautiful dream. Regardless of that, I am still motivated, still have ambitions. Not only was I raised that way, my environment makes me feel that way and encourages my desire to prove more. Right now I’m in my best years to play football. I just hope that good health will follow me so I can thrive.

How big an achievement was qualifying for Euro 2012?

The qualification campaign was very hard for us all. Yet in Croatia it seemed like everyone had got used to us qualifying for the finals of the major

championships. And our run of appearances since 1996, with two exceptions [Euro 2000 and the 2010 World Cup], really is amazing. The Croatian domestic league is weak and it’s a wonder that we even have a team that has been among the top 10 or 12 in the world for some years now.

Bilic has come under much criticism. How has that affected you?

Bilic’s contribution to the team is huge and each one of us should be grateful to him that we are there. He’s the one that helped us, he gave us opportunities to advance our careers. And I’ll be sincerely sorry if the announcements happen to be true, if the boss really does leave after the Euros. These kind of things are not good for the atmosphere in the team before the start of the Euros, but regardless of all that I am confident we will give our best. We are all motivated to succeed.

You’re in a tough group with Spain and Italy...

Actually we’ll have our most difficult time, in the psychological sense, at the start, against a tough Irish team. I know what awaits us there, Bilic also knows it well. It’s imperative to win that game. If we do, things are suddenly different. I am a realistic man, I also know that in football the favourites do not always win. That means our match against Ireland is

crucial. After that we will be looking for a place in the quarter-finals.

Last summer there was talk about you leaving Tottenham...

The only thing that could encourage me to leave is my ambition, not money. If the money was the reason then I would’ve already accepted the offer of chairman [Daniel] Levy. I was hoping this season we would win a trophy, the FA Cup, but we lost to Chelsea. Some people blamed me but I’ve never shirked my responsibilities. However, the pressure is great and I feel it especially when I play for the national team. In the friendly against Sweden, in Zagreb, for the first time I experienced what it’s like to be whistled at. It bothered me. Even when I don’t play well I fight, I never hold back. So when a player is struggling, especially when he’s trying his hardest for the team, it is not nice to hear the boos. We lost that game 3-1. We all knew we played poorly but it happens.

How do you see Euro 2012?

Spain are favourites, that’s logical, although the rivalry of the Barcelona and Real Madrid players may have an effect on them. Germany and Holland will be up there. I hope we can be dark horses, and another surprise team might be Denmark. Most importantly, I expect the competition to be open. I’m sure we will see very attractive football.

Interview by Zdravko Reic

THE VIEW FROM CROATIA

“The team play too slowly. We claim that we control the game, that we have possession of the ball, but we’re speaking about a passive possession with too much play at the back. For those reasons we don’t stand a chance against Italy and especially against Spain, although Croatia typically does best against teams that play offensively. Otherwise, I think that making the 16 best teams in Europe is already an excellent achievement for such a small country”

Anton Samovojka, Sportske Novosti daily sports paper

“It will be a success if we get the third place in our group. Let’s face it, we have no team, our defence is powerless, we have an ineffective attack – unless Nikica Jelavic transforms himself into Davor Suker. Otherwise, I think it’s time to say goodbye to Slaven Bilic”

Tomislav Zidak, Jutarnji list



“Let’s not deceive ourselves, even though football is a game of surprises. However, Spain will proceed to the next stage, Italy also, so our target is third place. We shouldn’t be disappointed with that.

Croatia have fulfilled the plan. In Poland, we should lay the foundations for the Brazil World Cup qualifiers. I believe that Bilic will take care of that, regardless of the fact that the team will be led by someone else in the next qualifying cycle”

Robert Jarni, ex-international



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Germany 12/13 Home
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Brazil 12/13 Away
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GOALKEEPERS



Ivan KELAVA

Age 24 (20.02.88)
Dinamo Zagreb
QR: 0 goals
Despite conceding 22 goals in six Champions League games this season, he was still his club's best player overall in the competition. Has had problems with his weight in the past.



Stipe PLETIKOSA

Age 33 (08.01.79)
Rostov (Rus)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Extremely religious, he wears a T-shirt with an image of the Virgin Mary under his jersey and has been known to spend his holidays meditating at a monastery at Medjugorje in Bosnia.



Danijel SUBASIC

Age 27 (27.10.84)
Monaco (Fra)
QR: 0 goals
Yet to concede a goal for his country. Became second-choice behind Pletikosa when Vedran Runje retired. Joined French second-tier side Monaco from Hajduk Split in January.

COACH

Slaven BILIC

Age 43 (11.09.68)
Croatia coach since July 2006
As a central defender he helped Croatia to finish third at the 1998 World Cup before becoming coach of Hajduk Split. Later took charge of the national under-21s for two years before succeeding Zlatko Kranjcar as coach of the senior side. Plays guitar in a Croatian rock band called Rawbau, whose song *Vatreno Ludilo* ("fiery madness") became a big hit and was the country's unofficial song at the 2008 Euros – where Bilic was the youngest national coach.



DEFENDERS



Vedran CORLUKA

Age 26 (05.02.86)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
QR: 11 games/1 goal
Spent the second half of the season on loan to Bundesliga club Bayer Leverkusen, who have an option to buy him in the summer. Can play anywhere in defence but normally used at right-back.



Dejan LOVREN

Age 22 (07.05.89)
Lyon (Fra)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Powerful central defender who is good in the air. Moved to Lyon from Dinamo Zagreb in January 2010.



Gordon SCHILDENFELD

Age 27 (18.03.85)
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Has played in Turkey and Austria, as well as Croatia and Germany. Not particularly quick, but reads the game well from centre-half and shows good anticipation.



Josip SIMUNIC

Age 34 (18.02.78)
Dinamo Zagreb
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Born in Australia, he spent 13 seasons in the Bundesliga before joining Dinamo in 2011. A central defender or left-back, he was shown three yellow cards in a 2006 World Cup game against Australia.



Ivan STRINIC

Age 24 (17.07.87)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk (Ukr)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Provides a good supply line of crosses from the left flank and has also improved the defensive side of his game. Has struggled with injuries at times this season. Joined Dnipro from Hajduk Split in 2011.

MIDFIELDERS



Tomislav DUJMOVIC

Age 31 (26.02.81)
Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Has been on loan to Real Zaragoza of Spain since January. Tireless defensive worker, he is fluent in Russian and German.



Niko KRANJCAR

Age 27 (13.08.84)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
QR: 8 games/4 goals
The son of former national coach Zlatko Kranjcar. Not the most mobile at times but highly creative and able to shoot with either foot.



Luka MODRIC

Age 26 (09.09.85)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
QR: 10 games/1 goal
Strong and resilient despite looking physically weak, his creative abilities are vital to his side. Tottenham were reported to have turned down a bid of £40m from Chelsea at the start of this season.



Ivan PERISIC

Age 23 (02.02.89)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Went to France at 16 and later played in Belgium before joining Dortmund last year. Happy to play on the right or the left and can also be pushed up front.



Danijel PRANJIC

Age 31 (12.02.81)
Bayern Munich (Ger)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
A midfielder by profession, he can also play at left-back. Despite never having scored at international level he has an eye for goal and was once fourth-top scorer in Holland when playing for Heerenveen.

FORWARDS



EDUARDO

Age 29 (25.02.83)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
QR: 11 games/3 goals
Born in Brazil, he is also known as "Dudu". Came back from a terrible ankle injury sustained while playing for Arsenal, he is Croatia's second-highest goalscorer of all time, behind Davor Suker.



Nikola JELAVIC

Age 26 (27.08.85)
Everton (Eng)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Scored 30 goals in 45 Scottish league games for Rangers before joining Everton in January. Has also played in Belgium and Austria.



Nikola KALINIC

Age 24 (05.01.88)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk (Ukr)
QR: 6 games/2 goals
A penalty-box predator, he joined Dnipro from Blackburn Rovers in August 2011. Made his competitive debut for Croatia at Euro 2008 as a substitute against Poland.



Mario MANDZUKIC

Age 26 (21.05.85)
Wolfsburg (Ger)
QR: 10 games/3 goals
Versatile striker who can play all across the front line and score goals as well as create them. Combative with a good touch and pace.



Ivica OLIC

Age 32 (14.09.79)
Bayern Munich (Ger)
QR: 5 games/2 goals
A player of great energy and heart, and surprising dribbling skill, he has played in two World Cups and two Euro Championships. Expected to leave Bayern when his contract expires this summer.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Shape will be adjusted for must-win game against Republic of Ireland

Croatia are set up as a counter-attacking side, with the focus on Modric's quick thinking. But their biggest problem is that he is the only player with the ability to control the game and everything goes through him.

Against Italy and Spain, the emphasis will be on a tight defence – and not just the back four. Srna, who plays right-back for his club, will be the right-sided midfielder for the national team. Dujmovic shields the defence (a role



8
0

Domagoj VIDA

Age 23 (29.04.89)
Dinamo Zagreb
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Central defender who can also play at right-back. Returned to Croatia from Bayer Leverkusen in June 2011 after struggling to make his mark in Germany.



3
0

Sime VRSALJKO

Age 20 (10.01.92)
Dinamo Zagreb
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Quick right-back who made his international debut against the Czech Republic in February 2011.



39
8

Ivan RAKITIC

Age 24 (10.03.88)
Sevilla (Spa)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Now recovered from a broken foot, he was capped at under-17, under-19 and under-21 level by the country of his birth, Switzerland, before pledging his allegiance to the country of his parents.



90
19

Darijo SRNA

Age 30 (01.05.82)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
QR: 10 games/1 goal
Packs a powerful shot. Won the UEFA Cup with Shakhtar in 2009 and has the name of his brother, Igor, who has Down's syndrome, tattooed on his chest.



37
3

Ognjen VUKOJEVIC

Age 28 (20.12.83)
Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
QR: 8 games/1 goal
Defensive midfielder who made his way from the Croatian third division to the national side. Possesses a good shot.

Vukojevic can also play), while Rakitic on the left side is a dependable operator when it comes to defensive tasks. Under this system, Croatia's main attacking threat comes down the flanks through the full-backs Corluka and Pranjić.

Against the Republic of Ireland, when Croatia will be seeking three points, a different system will be used, with Jelavic as a lone attacker.

The back four stays the same with two defensive midfielders, Dujmovic and Vukojevic, behind an attacking midfield three of Srna, Modric and Mandzukic. Eduardo could also come in for Mandzukic because he can play in a withdrawn position.

Zdravko Reic



Lone role...Jelavic

ALSO IN CONTENTION

MIDFIELDERS

Milan BADELJ

Age 23 (25.02.89)
Dinamo Zagreb
Caps 3 (1 goal)
QR: 1 game/1 goal
Dinamo captain, can attack and defend equally well.

Ivo ILICEVIC

Age 25 (14.11.86)
Hamburg
Caps 4 (1 goal)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Attack-minded operator who was born in Germany.

FORWARD

Ante VUKUSIC

Age 20 (04.06.91)
Hajduk Split
Caps 0
Flair player who was made club captain while still a teenager.

At last... Hubschman (right) and Limbersky mob Baros after he ends his 11-month international drought with a goal against the Republic of Ireland





CZECH REPUBLIC

Bilek's new blend



SAM BECKWITH
in Prague

As recently as last August, the knives were out for Michal Bilek and the Czech daily newspaper *Sport* listed "five reasons why the coach should go right now" – among them a lack of respect from the players and little support from the fans. Now, however, with qualification secured and his biggest stars in form, plus an influx of new talent reinvigorating the national squad, the 47-year-old might yet have the last laugh.

In truth, taking 13 points from eight games in qualifying was unimpressive, and of all the second-placed teams only Montenegro – who the Czechs beat in the play-offs – fared worse. But statistics alone are not a fair reflection of Bilek's achievement or of his side's chances at Euro 2012. While only the most blinkered fan would back them to win the tournament, they have improved steadily. They may not be the trailblazers of Euro 96 and 2004 but there is still a little room for optimism.

Ever since he took charge in 2009, Bilek has had to face persistent suggestions that his appointment owed more to his friendship with previous coach Ivan Hasek, chairman of the Czech FA at the time, than to managerial ability. But the critics tended to overlook the fact that Bilek had inherited a team that finished behind Slovakia and Slovenia in World Cup qualification and had lost four key players to international retirement: defenders Marek Jankulovski and Tomas Ujfalusi, midfielder Tomas Galasek and all-time leading scorer Jan Koller.

Drawn in a group in which finishing second to Spain presented the only realistic chance of qualification, the Czechs almost pulled off a

sensational victory over the defending champions last March, taking a 68th-minute lead through Jaroslav Plasil, only to concede two late David Villa goals.

Displays and results were generally low key, however, and goalless draws with Peru and Japan at last June's Kirin Cup did little to dispel the lingering gloom, while August's 3-0 friendly loss in Norway represented a new low.

New blood

While all of this had been going on, Bilek had been slowly introducing new blood to his side. In particular, he looked to Viktoria Plzen, whose attractive football had swept the provincial side to the 2011 league title and, incredibly, into the Champions League's group phase.

Left-back David Limbersky and midfielder Daniel Kolar would be the first of several Plzen players to feature in Bilek's squad. Most significantly, Petr Jiracek made his debut in the September draw with Scotland that would turn around Czech fortunes and instantly establish the versatile left-sided midfielder. Although secured with a late penalty, won by a blatant Jan Rezek dive, the point was a vital one, leaving the Czechs' fate in their own hands.

A thumping win in Lithuania secured a place in the play-offs, where a 3-0 aggregate win over Montenegro confirmed the strengths of Bilek's new blend. Unfortunately, the sweetness of qualification was soured somewhat by a drunken post-match celebration, captured on video, in which a number of players joined in a chant of "Radek Drulak has no dick" – a response to the striker-turned-pundit's

GROUP A

08.06.12	Russia (Wroclaw, Pol)
12.06.12	Greece (Wroclaw, Pol)
16.06.12	Poland (Wroclaw, Pol)

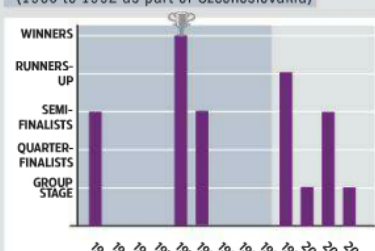
criticism of the team – resulting in heavy fines.

A more serious concern is a lack of goals. Bizarrely, left-back Michal Kadlec was the leading scorer in qualification, his four goals (three of them penalties) more than the combined total of strikers Milan Baros, Tomas Pekhart, Tomas Necid and David Lafata. Bilek seems intent on using Baros as a lone striker, even though he scored just once in qualification, and only ended an 11-month international goal drought in February's friendly against Ireland.

But with playmaker Tomas Rosicky fit and keeper Petr Cech on form, the Czechs are tough to beat. And if the newcomers make good on their early promise, a surprise or two is certainly possible. **WS**

EURO RECORD

(1960 to 1992 as part of Czechoslovakia)



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP I

07.09.10	Lithuania (h)	0-1
08.10.10	Scotland (h)	1-0
12.10.10	Liechtenstein (a)	2-0
25.03.11	Spain (a)	1-2
29.03.11	Liechtenstein (h)	2-0
03.09.11	Scotland (a)	2-2
07.10.11	Spain (h)	0-2
11.10.11	Lithuania (a)	4-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	8	8	0	0	26	6	24
Czech Rep	8	4	1	3	12	8	13
Scotland	8	3	2	3	9	10	11
Lithuania	8	1	2	5	4	13	5
L'chtenstein	8	1	1	6	3	17	4

PLAY-OFF

11.11.11	Montenegro (h)	2-0
15.11.11	Montenegro (a)	1-0

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Rep of Ireland (a)	1-1
26.05.12	Israel (in Austria)	
01.06.12	Hungary (h)	

BASE CAMP



The Czech squad will travel by train from Prague to Wroclaw on June 3 and will stay at the city's Hotel Monopol throughout the group phase. They will train at the Stadion Oporowska, former home of local title-chasing side Slask Wroclaw.

Michal Bilek

“I was convinced we were on the right path even when the results were not good”

Group A is widely seen as the tournament's weakest. Do you share that view?

Our group is very balanced. I see danger in the fact that it contains none of the main favourites as that raises fans' expectations. And I do not think that this group is the weakest. Our main goal is to advance from the group and then we'll see.

What are your main strengths?

Of course, we'll be relying on our more experienced players, such as Petr Cech, Tomas Rosicky and Milan Baros. The greatest strength is probably the fact that we have gradually created a united team that pulls together.

Your time as national coach began badly and the team struggled. Now, however, you have turned things around. What's changed?

After the 2010 World Cup qualification campaign we lost some experienced players and we had to find replacements. We tried out more than 50 players and that was one of the reasons why our results weren't so good right from the beginning. Fortunately, we succeeded in choosing the right team and system at the right time, and success has come.

You were heavily criticised in the Czech media during the qualification campaign. How did you manage to cope with that?

It wasn't easy, but I was convinced we were on the right path, even when the results weren't good. I'm glad that time has shown this to be true.

You've used a 4-5-1 formation in recent games, with Baros as a lone striker. What are the advantages of this system?

I'd characterise our system as 4-2-3-1, but the system is not as important as how the players are able to carry it out. The advantage of this system is that it creates a strong midfield, and that there are fast and skilful players on the wings who can support Baros.

How does qualifying for Euro 2012 as a coach compare to qualifying for the 1990 World Cup as a player?

Both brought me happiness because in each case the path to the finals was a

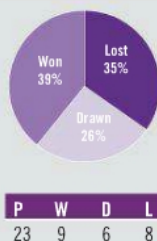


Celebration...Bilek is given the treatment by his players after beating Montenegro in the play-offs

COACH'S RECORD



Bilek was heavily criticised when he began his career as national coach with four games without a win. He is now unbeaten in four.



difficult one. The difference, of course, is that as a player I was responsible only for myself whereas as a coach I am responsible for all the squad.

You've picked several Viktoria Plzen players. What impact have they had?

Well, Viktoria Plzen are the Czech champions, they qualified for the Champions League and their players have gained confidence and experience, so we've been able to benefit from this in the national team.

Was the squad for the Ireland friendly – plus Tomas Rosicky – basically the one going to Poland?

There's no time for experimentation as the next time we'll get together will be at the training camp before the tournament. Therefore, there will be no major changes to the squad – I hope! Like all national coaches, my biggest fear is injuries.

At every big tournament there are players who are little-known internationally who make a big impact. Which of your squad could do that at Euro 2012?

Every player wants to become better known and move to bigger clubs. Today, however, scouts have players well mapped. There is far more TV coverage around Europe so teams know each other much better. It's difficult to discover someone new.

There are more domestic players in this Czech squad than in the past...

The Gambrinus liga can't be compared with top European leagues as Czech clubs can't afford to sign top players; the opposite is true. So high-quality Czech players leave our league to go abroad. But the fact that we now have more Czech league players in the team is good. Those players are more motivated to play for the national team.

This is your first big international tournament as a coach. Have you asked any other coaches for advice?

Everyone must find their own way so I will not rely on anyone else's experience.

Will you maintain a Czech team tradition of taking its own food and drink to international tournaments?

No, we're confident we have everything in place.

Interview by Sam Beckwith



Boost... Cech says the squad has been improved by the influx of Viktoria Plzen players

Petr Cech

“It’s great to see more Czech-based players in the squad, but I worry everything could go back to the way it used to be”

What are your thoughts on Group A?

It’s actually very difficult because all four teams are of the same quality and anybody can beat anybody. Every point and goal will be important. Let’s get out of the group first, but reaching the quarter-finals would be great.

Does being drawn against Greece bring back bad memories of your semi-final defeat at Euro 2004? Is this a chance for revenge?

It’s not about revenge but the motivation to get the best result – one that would put us through to the knockout stages.

Because of the history of the two countries, there’s always a lot of emotion when the Czech Republic play Russia at ice hockey. Is it the same with football?

I’ve never played against Russia so I don’t know. I don’t think it will be such a big deal for the new generation, who haven’t been affected by what happened in the past.

You’ll play co-hosts Poland in your final group game. How difficult would it be to get a result from that game if you needed one?

It will be difficult because they are playing at home and will have incredible support. Hopefully we won’t need a result by then.

Are there any young, up-and-coming Czech players we should look out for at the tournament?

Let’s see who makes the squad first!

Following Viktoria Plzen’s recent successes, several of their players have been called up to the national team. Coming from Plzen yourself, it must make you especially proud...

Of course. It was great for Viktoria Plzen and great for the national team too, because we suddenly gained a lot of players with Champions League experience, which was vitally important. We basically lost two generations of players recently so it has taken time to rebuild the team. We’re a small country so it is good to see more Czech-based players in the squad. My worry is that after Euro 2012 everything could go back to how it was before, with most of the Czech-based players being bought by good European teams.

Michal Bilek was heavily criticised in the Czech media during the qualification campaign. What do you think his strengths are as a coach?

He did very well under pressure – which he didn’t deserve because it was hard for him to rebuild the team without so many experienced players.

In your opening Euro 2012 qualifier, you lost at home to Lithuania. What

has changed the mood of the squad since then?

It’s mainly because our new players have had a chance to grow up alongside the more experienced players. We have developed into a more close-knit team, our spirit is excellent.

The Czech Republic lost twice to Spain in qualification. Can anybody stop them at Euro 2012?

At a tournament anything is possible and nobody is unbeatable – even the best team in the world, like Spain.

What’s your earliest memory of the European Championship?

Watching the Danish miracle in 1992. Of course, four years later we reached the Final and, as a 14-year-old, I was so caught up in it all. It was great to see the buzz around the whole country. But it was sad to lose in the Final.

Euro 2012 comes at the end of a long and difficult Premier League season. Do top-level footballers play too many games?

I don’t mind the number of games. Most players would say that it would just be nice to have more of a rest before the next season starts.

Interview by Sam Beckwith

THE VIEW FROM CZECH REPUBLIC



“Let’s be realistic, we won’t reach the Final. Yes, Petr Cech is still one of the best in the world. The full-backs are good, and Tomas Rosicky, Petr Jiracek and Vaclav Pilar are good in midfield as well. But the central defenders and strikers are what I’m worried

about. Milan Baros is unable to score, Tomas Necid was injured for a long time, Tomas Pekhart has scored six goals in the Bundesliga but international standards are a bit higher. David Lafata has scored a record number of goals in a Czech league season but this is the international game. If you only score one goal at a tournament you won’t be a great success”

Jaromir Bosak, TV commentator with Ceska televize



“It’s quite a success to have qualified but I think few goals will be scored in our group and every one of them could make a difference. It’s a tricky group because it’s considered an easy one. If we go further, it will be as expected; if not, it will be seen as a major flop. And if someone like Spain stands in their way...”

Antonin Panenka, a Euro winner with Czechoslovakia in 1976



“Thanks to the recent influx of young players, the team plays with more energy than before. If there are goals – which, due to Milan Baros’ recent form and the lack of other reliable strikers, is a major concern – we should progress together with Poland or Russia. After that, who knows, but let’s not get into thinking it will be 1996 all over again”

Michal Petrak, journalist with the daily paper Sport

GOALKEEPERS



Petr CEC

Age 29 (20.05.82)
Chelsea (Eng)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Plays in a headguard after colliding with Republic of Ireland's Stephen Hunt during a club game in 2006. Has worn contact lenses since 2007 when it was discovered that he was short-sighted.



Jaroslav DROBNÝ

Age 32 (18.10.79)
Hamburg (Ger)
QR: 0 goals
Former under-21 international who also played at the 2000 Olympics. Was baptised while playing for Panionios in Greece, despite the problems submerging his entire 6ft 3in frame.



Jan LASTUVKA

Age 29 (07.07.82)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk (Ukr)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Made his debut in September's 2-2 draw with Scotland. Had loan spells with Fulham, Bochum and West Ham United before joining Dnipro in 2009. Split from his wife Lenka, a former handball player, last year.

COACH

Michal BILEK
Age 47 (13.04.65)
Czech Republic coach since October 2009

Former midfielder who played and scored for Czechoslovakia at the 1990 World Cup and spent two years playing for Real Betis in Spain, suffering relegation from La Liga in his first campaign. Won seven league titles with Sparta Prague as a player and one as the club's coach. Had a brief spell in Costa Rica in charge of Cartagines early in his management career. Appointed national boss after serving as assistant to his predecessor, Ivan Hasek.



DEFENDERS



Theodor GEBRE SELASSIE

Age 25 (24.12.86)
Slovan Liberec
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Right-sided wing-back who is the son of an Ethiopian father and a Czech mother. The first person of colour to play for the national side, his sister Anna represents the Czech Republic at handball.



Roman HUBNÍK

Age 27 (06.06.84)
Hertha Berlin (Ger)
QR: 9 games/1 goal
Tall central defender who's very strong in the air. Joined Hertha in 2010 after a loan at Sparta Prague from FC Moscow. His brother Michal, who is a forward, has also played for the national team.



Michal KADLEC

Age 27 (13.12.84)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
QR: 10 games/4 goals
Left-back who can also fill in as a central defender; he scored an own goal on his international debut. The son of Miroslav Kadlec, the Czech Republic's captain at Euro 96. First-choice penalty taker.



David LIMBERSKÝ

Age 28 (06.10.83)
Viktoria Plzeň
QR: 0 goals
Quick left-sided defender/midfielder who is now in his third spell with Plzeň following loan moves to Modena and Tottenham Hotspur and a period with Sparta Prague. A keen golfer.



Daniel PUDIL

Age 26 (27.09.85)
Cesena (Ita)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Naturally left-sided full-back or midfielder. His international career stalled following a drink-driving conviction in 2007 but he refound his form at Belgian side Genk. A fan of MotoGP motorcycle racing.

MIDFIELDERS



Tomas HUBŠMAN

Age 30 (04.09.81)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
QR: 7 games/1 goal
Defensive midfielder/central defender who played at Euro 2004. Has won 11 trophies with Shakhtar - more than any other Czech footballer playing abroad, other than Pavel Nedved.



Petr JIRACEK

Age 26 (02.03.86)
Wolfsburg (Ger)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Playing second-tier football as recently as 2008, the left-sided midfielder broke into the national team as a member of Plzeň's title-winning side last season.



Milan PETRZELA

Age 26 (19.06.83)
Viktoria Plzeň
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Wide midfielder with good technique, he joined Plzeň after failing to make the grade at Sparta Prague. Made his national team debut in the Euro qualifier in Liechtenstein in October 2010.



Václav PILAR

Age 23 (13.10.88)
Viktoria Plzeň
QR: 3 games/1 goal
Skilful winger who made his Czech debut at last year's Kirin Cup, just a year after his league debut. Currently on loan at Plzeň from Hradec Králové but expected to join Wolfsburg in the summer.



Jaroslav PLASIL

Age 30 (05.01.82)
Bordeaux (Fra)
QR: 9 games/2 goals
A defensive midfielder at Bordeaux but takes a more advanced role with the Czech team. Played at Euro 2004, the 2006 World Cup and Euro 2008. Brothers Marek and Jan are also professionals.

FORWARDS



Milan BAROŠ

Age 30 (28.10.81)
Galatasaray (Tur)
QR: 7 games/1 goal
His career has been blighted by injuries and indifferent form since winning the Golden Boot at Euro 2004. Rumoured to be considering retiring from international football after this tournament.



David LAFATA

Age 30 (18.09.81)
Jablonec
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Originally a wide midfielder, he became the all-time record goalscorer in the Czech league this season. Hunts pheasant and wild boar in his spare time.



Tomas NECID

Age 22 (13.08.89)
CSKA Moscow (Rus)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Top scorer at 2006's UEFA Under-17 Championship and 2008's Under-19 Championship. Only returned to action in February after seven months out with a knee-ligament injury.



Tomas PEKHART

Age 22 (26.05.89)
Nuremberg (Ger)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Joined Tottenham Hotspur after impressing at the 2007 Under-20 World Cup but failed to make the breakthrough. Returned to the Czech league, where he earned a move to Nuremberg.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Defending in numbers while still getting forward to support the centre-forward

Bilek describes 4-2-3-1 as his ideal formation as the fluid and pacy midfield allows his side to both attack and defend in numbers.

Typically, Baros plays as a lone striker, but he can be supported by attacking midfielder Rosicky, two wide midfielders (Plasil plus Rezek, Pilar, Petrzela or Pudil), the deeper-lying Jiracek and a wing-back (either Gebre Selassie down the right or Kadlec down the left).

If Baros is out, or a second forward is

4-2-3-1



15
0

Jan RAJNOCH

Age 30 (30.09.81)
Sivasspor (Tur)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Currently used as a back-up central defender but can also play in midfield. "Rajny" moved to Turkey in 2010, initially with Ankaragucu. Joined Sivasspor last year.



1
0

Frantisek RAJTORAL

Age 26 (12.03.86)
Viktoria Plzen
QR: 0 games
Former under-21 who made his senior debut in February's friendly in Ireland. Right-back who played in the Champions League with Plzen, he was diagnosed with fatigue syndrome early in his career.



24
3

Tomas SIVOK

Age 31 (14.05.80)
Besiktas (Tur)
QR: 7 games/1 goal
Centre-half who's strong in the air with good positional sense. Joined Besiktas after Euro 2008. A big hip hop fan who once fronted a Czech anti-racism campaign.

needed, Bilek must choose between Necid, Pekhart and the in-form Lafata. With Necid only just back from a long-term injury, Pekhart seems the likelier option.

Should Rosicky be injured, Stajner is his most likely replacement.

Hubschman is Bilek's main defensive midfielder and he will sit in front of a first-choice central defensive partnership of Hubnik and Sivok. Rajnoch or, more likely, the adaptable Plasil can fill in as the defensive midfielder if Hubschman is injured.

If Hubnik or Sivok are unavailable, Bilek can either switch Kadlec to central defence, bringing in Limbersky or Pudil as left-back, or use Rajnoch.

Sam Beckwith



12
3

Jan REZEK

Age 29 (05.05.82)
Anorthosis Famagusta (Cyp)
QR: 5 games/2 goals
Strong, quick forward who normally plays as a wide midfielder for the national team. Played under Bilek at Sparta Prague but only broke into the national team at Plzen in 2011. Moved to Cyprus last summer.



85
20

Tomas ROSICKY

Age 31 (04.10.80)
Arsenal (Eng)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Occasionally brilliant but frustratingly injury-prone creator. National captain, he missed Euro 2008 with a hamstring tendon injury that kept him out of action for an astonishing 18 months.



37
4

Jiri STAJNER

Age 35 (27.05.76)
Hanover (Ger)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Attacking midfielder/forward with good vision and technique. Can play on the wing but prefers a deeper role. Nicknamed "Svejk" because of his resemblance to the anti-hero of Jaroslav Hasek's comic novel.



Lone front runner...Baros

ALSO IN CONTENTION

DEFENDERS

Tomas KALAS

Age 18 (15.05.93)
Chelsea (Eng)
Caps 0
Central defender/right-back currently on loan to Dutch side Vitesse.

Zdenek POSPECH

Age 33 (14.12.78)
Mainz (Ger)
Caps 31 (2 goals)
QR: 8 game/0 goals
Right-back who lost his place in the Czech starting line-up after moving to the Bundesliga from Copenhagen.

Marek SUCHY

Age 24 (29.03.88)
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Central defender/defensive midfielder overlooked recently.

MIDFIELDERS

Mario HOLEK

Age 25 (28.10.86)
Sparta Prague
Caps 6 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Defensive midfielder who joined Sparta in December after a spell with Ukrainian side Dnipro.

Daniel KOLAR

Age 26 (27.10.85)
Viktoria Plzen
Caps 9 (1 goal)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Another member of Plzen's 2011 championship-winning team.

Ladislav KREJCI

Age 19 (05.07.92)
Sparta Prague
Caps 0
Left-sided midfielder who has been in sparkling league form.

Marek MATEJOVSKY

Age 30 (20.12.81)
Sparta Prague
Caps 15 (1 goal)
QR: 0 games
Former Reading playmaker who has been impressive in the Czech league this season.

Jan POLAK

Age 31 (14.03.81)
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Caps 57 (7 goals)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Defensive midfielder whose career has been blighted by injuries in recent years.

Kamil VACEK

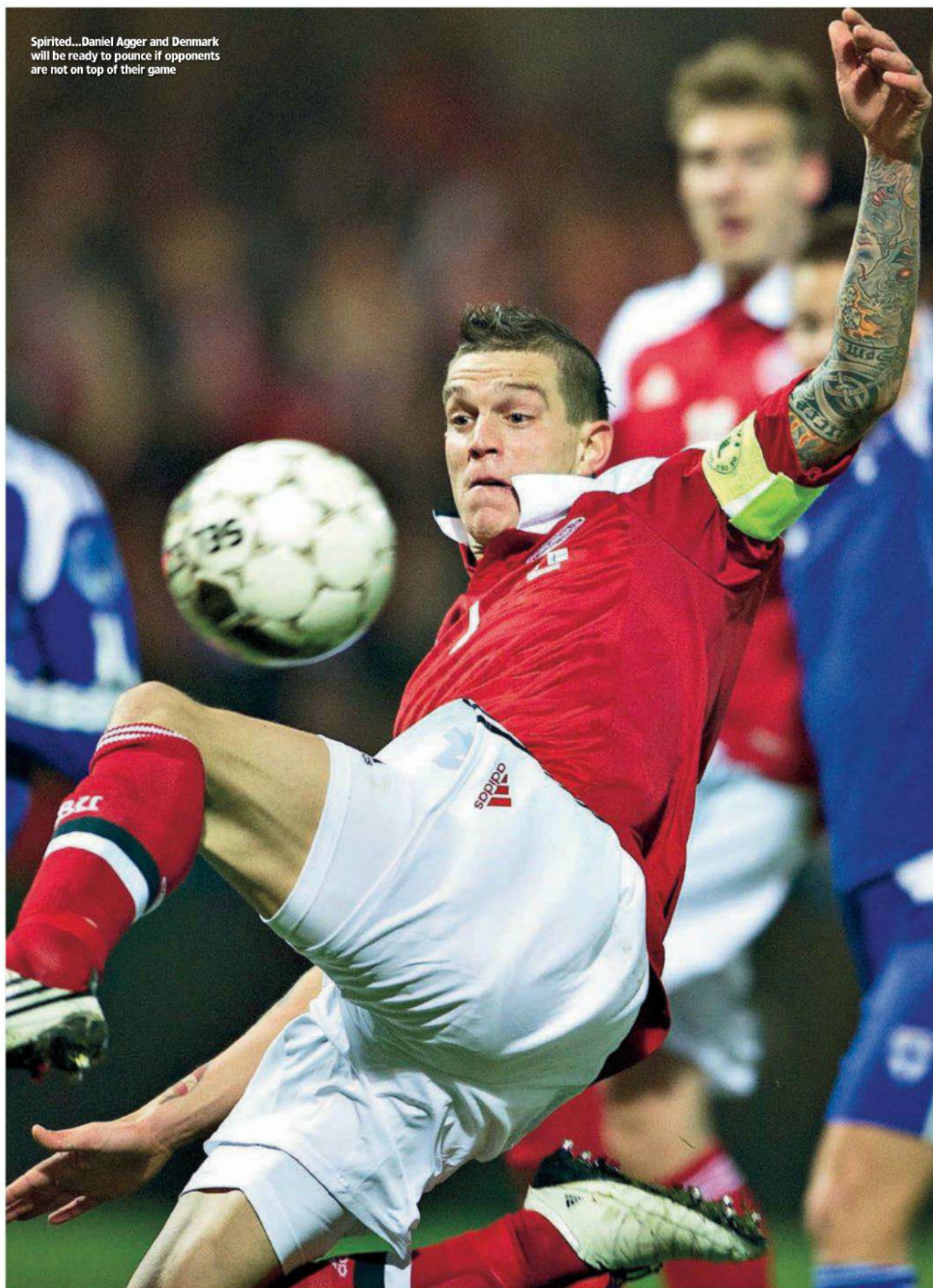
Age 24 (18.05.87)
Chievo (Ita)
Caps 6 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Creative midfielder who played just 15 minutes during the qualification campaign.

FORWARD

Libor KOZAK

Age 22 (30.05.89)
Lazio (Ita)
Caps 0
Former under-19 and under-21 international who was called into the full squad by Bilek in March.

Spirited...Daniel Agger and Denmark will be ready to pounce if opponents are not on top of their game



DENMARK Ignore at your peril

Underestimated Danes have new generation emerging



JIM HOLDEN

Every time Denmark qualify for a major international tournament, the first question asked is can the fairy-tale triumph of 1992 be repeated. Well, not this time; not even Hans Christian Andersen would dare write such a script for Danish glory.

But that's not because the Danes don't have a fine young team with masses of potential. With the team ninth in the official FIFA world rankings, there might be the first stirrings of their best side in 20 years.

The trouble this time is the group of destruction they face, drawn alongside Germany, Holland and Portugal, who are ranked second, fourth and fifth respectively.

Had Denmark been drawn in Group A rather than Group B they would be favourites to progress to the quarter-finals rather than the rank outsiders to whom nobody gives a hope.

The mood in Copenhagen since the draw has been one of realism. While their three opponents are all blessed with the superstars of the modern game, the Danes rely on a wonderful team ethic and the emerging talent of Ajax's talented playmaker Christian Eriksen.

Being cast as the makeweights, however, could be to Denmark's advantage.

They certainly have the gumption to seize on any complacency within the opposition. They topped a qualifying group that contained Portugal and near-neighbours Norway, and also overcame Portugal in the previous World Cup qualifying campaign.

And while many of Denmark's players are underestimated with their clubs in various leagues around Europe, they perform with

distinction for their country. Striker Nicklas Bendtner is a classic example: often scorned in the English Premier League, but with a record of 17 goals in 46 games for Denmark. Veteran winger Dennis Rommedahl is much the same, with 114 caps and 21 goals to his name, while another unsung stalwart, midfielder William Kvist, is enjoying a fine season at Stuttgart.

Experienced leadership

The experienced leadership of coach Morten Olsen also explains why this Danish team are serial achievers. He is calm, authoritative and hugely admired by the players, as well as being the longest-serving boss of a major national side at 12 years and counting.

He has a settled squad, with no major selection issues, and it is a proud, spirited and realistic Denmark that will go into another tournament being written off by everyone, but ready to tweak a few famous noses.

Olsen has just signed on for another two years, citing the enthusiasm and potential of the squad. It is his view that Euro 2012 can be a stepping stone to the 2014 World Cup, where the new generation will be more mature, and other prodigious young Danish talent, such as Ajax's 17-year-old striker Viktor Fischer, will be coming through.

Olsen guided the team through qualifying with commendable intelligence, with home wins against Norway and Portugal following a crucial 1-1 draw away to the Norwegians.

Denmark begin their Euro 2012 campaign against Holland, just as they did at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. In that match, at

GROUP B

09.06.12	Holland (Kharkiv, Ukr)
13.06.12	Portugal (Lviv, Ukr)
17.06.12	Germany (Lviv, Ukr)

Soccer City, the Danes lost to self-inflicted defensive wounds after matching the Dutch for much of the game.

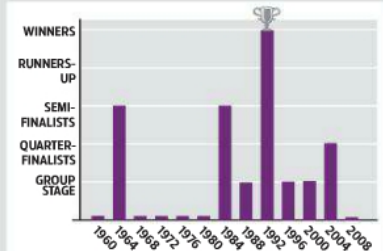
Their second game this time is against Portugal, over whom they have had the Indian sign in recent years. That knowledge inspires hope among the squad, not least the bullish Eriksen, who is on the shopping list of all the major European clubs.

"We have already beaten the Portuguese before and we hope we can do it again," he says. "Then, perhaps, we can have a bit of luck against the other teams and we can progress from a really tough group."

"Of course, I am taking a lot of stick from the Dutch players at Ajax. They think they will beat us and qualify for the quarter-finals. But I think we can defeat them."

And it is that hint of complacency that will suit the Danes just fine. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP H

07.09.10	Iceland (h)	1-0
08.10.10	Portugal (a)	1-3
12.10.10	Cyprus (h)	2-0
26.03.11	Norway (a)	1-1
04.06.11	Iceland (a)	2-0
06.09.11	Norway (h)	2-0
07.10.11	Cyprus (a)	4-1
11.10.11	Portugal (h)	2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	8	6	1	1	15	6	19
Portugal	8	5	1	2	21	12	16
Norway	8	5	1	2	10	7	16
Iceland	8	1	1	6	6	14	4
Cyprus	8	0	2	6	7	20	2

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02	Russia (h)	0-2
26.05	Brazil (in Germany)	
02.06	Australia (h)	

BASE CAMP



Denmark are due to arrive in Poland on June 4 and will be staying at the Hotel Marine in Kolobrzeg, which is 125 miles from Gdansk, and training at the city's Stadion Miejski, which is home to Polish third division side Kotwica Kolobrzeg.

Morten Olsen

“Christian Eriksen is a wonderful young talent but he cannot carry the team by himself”

Denmark won the European title 20 years ago. Can you do it again?

What happened in '92 was very special. Denmark didn't even qualify for that tournament, if you remember. Back then there were only eight teams in the tournament and now there are 16. That means one more match, one tough extra hurdle to become champions. But everything is possible in football. There is also the opposition. Portugal without Cristiano Ronaldo, for example, is not the same as Portugal with Cristiano Ronaldo. It is about playing well for three weeks only, and everything is possible.

What benefits are there to being an international coach for 12 years?

I think it helps that you see the players develop from youngsters when they first arrive, right through to being experienced and mature footballers. You know about them and who they are when they have been with you for four, five or six years. I have enjoyed that and it's why I have stayed so long in the job. Yes, I have missed club football, and in those 12 years there have been plenty of opportunities to join clubs, but I also love working with my national team.

What persuaded you to carry on for two more years after Euro 2012?

The big reason is that the players wanted me to stay – and that is very satisfying – both the younger players and the more experienced ones. I would like to carry on and try to reach the World Cup in Brazil. That is an ambition for a football person.

How important is the talent of Christian Eriksen to the team?

He is a wonderful young talent, everyone can see that, but he is still only a young player and he is just one man in the side. He cannot carry the team by himself and we have told him that he shouldn't try to do that. He has to keep developing as he is, and I think that one more year at Ajax would be good for him. I hope that happens. If he keeps improving he will become a great talent and ready to show that in Brazil in 2014.

Did you consider selecting Viktor Fischer, the 17-year-old winning rave reviews in the Ajax academy?

No. That's the straight answer. He is another very promising talent, but he

has played only in youth football so far, never in the Ajax senior side. You cannot take a player to a major international tournament if he is not in his club's first team. It's not possible. But everyone at Ajax knows next season he will start to play in the seniors, and then we will see.

Do you think that international football become less popular and less important with the rise of the Champions League?

No, I don't believe that. It is true that some friendly internationals do not have the same significance that they did 15 years ago because there is so much football played now, and so much of it on television, but the European Championship and World Cup are still at the peak. The whole country watches these tournaments and they have a completely

different feel to the Champions League. I was on the UEFA technical committee at Euro 2008 and saw for myself the colour and songs the fans brought to the stadia. It was fantastic, and I know in Denmark the tournaments are very special.

Which players will be the stars of this tournament?

In our group we have Robin Van Persie, the top scorer in the English Premier League, Mario Gomez, top scorer in the Bundesliga, and Cristiano Ronaldo, top scorer along with Lionel Messi in the Spanish league. You don't have to look any further than those three for the people who will shine in this tournament. What we won't see are any surprises, any new stars from nowhere. Football has changed and that time is over. Everybody knows about everybody in the era of the Champions League and so much TV coverage.

Who in your opinion are the likely winners this summer?

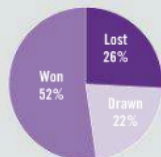
I still think Spain are the favourites. They play such good football and their players are not complacent. Germany are also potential champions. They always have a very strong mentality and now they are playing very good football. Maybe they feel it is time to win something.

Interview by Jim Holden

COACH'S RECORD



Olsen, who won 102 caps for Denmark as a player, is now one of the longest-serving national coaches in the world.



P	W	D	L
126	66	28	32

Advice...Olsen with Eriksen



Century...Sorensen has joined the distinguished 100-caps brigade



Thomas Sorensen

“Morten Olsen is so organised, he’s always got a Plan A, B, C and D”

Why is Morten Olsen such a good international coach?

He has a good blend. He does his homework, he’s organised, he’s always got a Plan A, B, C and D. He scouts his players really well and he has a set philosophy of how he wants the team to play. He doesn’t necessarily pick the players who look the best on paper but those who fit his system. He has had great success with that. When you have been a national coach for 12 years you have to get on with your players and he does that. We all have great respect for him. He will phone you when you get injured; if your wife gives birth there is a card from him. He is tough but also caring. What he’s done is incredible.

What’s the mood like in the dressing room ahead of Euro 2012?

There is a big task ahead in our group. We definitely have two of the best teams in the world against us, and Portugal are not far behind, but it’s a challenge and we feel we can upset one or two teams. Our aim is to get through to the next stage. If everyone is fit and playing well then it’s possible. We don’t have 50 players like England or Spain, who can just drop another man in. We depend on our best players being there.

How does this team compare to those at previous tournaments?

The way we played in the qualifiers

makes this one of the best Denmark sides that I have been involved with. We played really well. In 2002 and 2004 we had good, experienced sides. At the 2010 World Cup a lot of things didn’t go right for us – too many injuries for a start. It looks a lot brighter now with youngsters like Christian Eriksen coming through.

Can you remember watching Denmark’s 1992 European Championship triumph?

Yes, of course. Anyone in Denmark above the age of five back then remembers that time. It was amazing, but sometimes things work out for the best when they come unexpectedly. It was a great summer. I was 12 years old, I watched it at home and then celebrated on the streets with what seemed like the whole country.

What qualities does Daniel Agger bring as captain of Denmark?

He is composed on the ball, a good defender and leader. He is a winner and that’s what you like in a captain. What he lacks in physical strength he makes up for by being clever in his positional play. He is a good penalty taker as well, and so precise with his passing.

Who are your other key players?

Every team has to score goals and Nicklas Bendtner has been important

for us in the qualifiers. We need him on top form. Christian Eriksen may get his big breakthrough. He is top quality, still learning but hopefully he can do very well. There is also William Kvist who has come a long way in the past few years. He played well against Barcelona in the Champions League when at Copenhagen and that gave him the confidence to move to a new level at Stuttgart.

Who are your tournament favourites?

You can’t count out Germany, Spain and Holland but you never know, there can be surprises. Look at Greece in 2004 and us in 1992.

Who were the biggest influences on you as a goalkeeper?

Peter Schmeichel was one, of course. I trained with him for a few years with the national team. He opened the door for a lot of us to come to English football. There was also Lars Høgh at my first club OB Odense. He is now the national team’s goalkeeping coach and played in the 1986 World Cup. He taught me from the age of 16 and I learned so much.

What was it like to win your 100th cap earlier this year?

It was a fantastic thing to achieve and to look back on when you finish your career. Not that many players can say they made 100 appearances for their country.

Interview by Jim Holden

THE VIEW FROM DENMARK



“Denmark are always at their best when they are underestimated. And if we see history repeat itself in this dynamite group then Morten Olsen’s team can have some success. I think it’s very important that the best players are 100 per cent fit. We cannot afford to have players at 70 to 80 per cent in such a tough group. Denmark have some fine young players but I think a veteran like Christian Poulsen can also play an important role”

Michael Laudrup, who won 104 caps for Denmark

“After tactically and creatively strong performances in qualification against Portugal and Norway, hopes were high...until the draw. However, this Danish team has the ability to produce upsets, especially if the Premier League core of the side – Thomas Sorensen, Daniel Agger and Nicklas Bendtner – stays intact and can be spiced up with the great midfield talent of Christian Eriksen”



Søren-Mikael Hansen, sports editor of Politiken



“Remember 1992 when Denmark won the European Championship? They progressed from the group stage with only four points – and they can do that again this time with a draw in the first match against Holland and a victory against Portugal. The Danes love the role of underdog and with the strongest team out they will be a very dangerous opponent”

Jan Jensen, sports columnist for Ekstra Bladet

GOALKEEPERS

Stephan ANDERSEN

Age 30 (26.11.81)
Evian (Fra)
QR: 0 games
Won the Danish Cup with Brøndby in 2008 and was named Danish keeper of the year. First choice at Evian but will probably play second fiddle to Sørensen for his country.


Anders LINDEGAARD

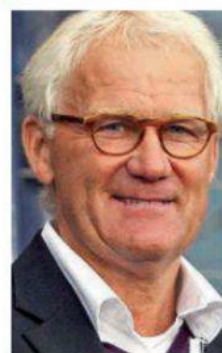
Age 28 (13.04.84)
Manchester United (Eng)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
A reserve at Odense and now Manchester United, he is beginning to bloom relatively late in his career. A hugely vocal presence.


Thomas SØRENSEN

Age 35 (12.06.76)
Stoke City (Eng)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Narrowly missed out on the first trophy of his career in the FA Cup Final with Stoke last season. This will be his fourth major tournament as Denmark's first-choice keeper.

COACH
Morten OLSEN

Age 62 (14.08.49)
Denmark coach since July 2000
The only man ever to achieve a century of international matches as both a player and a coach. Captained Denmark a record 50 times, representing his country at the 1984 and 1988 Euros, as well as the 1986 World Cup. As coach he guided the Danish side to the 2002 World Cup, Euro 2004 and the 2010 World Cup. His coaching career has seen him win two Danish league titles (1990 and 1991) with Brøndby and a Dutch league and cup double with Ajax (in 1998).


DEFENDERS

Daniel AGGER

Age 27 (12.12.84)
Liverpool (Eng)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Talented centre-half and skipper whose Premier League career has been plagued by injuries. Owns a pub with his uncle in Denmark and is the proprietor of two restaurants in England.


Andreas BJELLAND

Age 23 (11.07.88)
Nordsjælland
QR: 2 games/0 goals 
Primarily a centre-half, he can also play as a full-back or a defensive midfielder. Set to move to Twente this summer.


Nicolai BOILESEN

Age 20 (16.02.92)
Ajax (Hol)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Left-back whose place in the squad could be in jeopardy after his third hamstring injury of the season in April. His performances for the under-21s have reportedly attracted the interest of several major clubs.


Lars JACOBSEN

Age 32 (20.09.79)
Copenhagen
QR: 8 games/1 goal 
Although he has experience in the Bundesliga and the Premier League, his international debut came as late as 2006. He has since become a regular and played every game of the qualifying campaign.

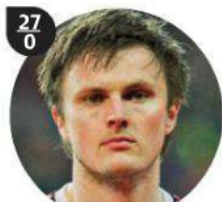

Simon KJÆR

Age 23 (26.03.89)
Wolfsburg (Ger)
QR: 7 games/0 goals 
Centre-back who almost joined Real Madrid in 2008 before being sold to Palermo instead. Has spent this season on loan to Roma but has yet to rediscover his best form in Serie A.

MIDFIELDERS

Christian ERIKSEN

Age 20 (14.02.92)
Ajax (Hol)
QR: 8 games/1 goal
One of Europe's most exciting young talents, his flair will be crucial if Denmark are to progress beyond the group stage. Wanted across Europe and last season helped Ajax regain the Eredivisie title.


William KVIST

Age 27 (24.02.85)
Stuttgart (Ger)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
One of several high-profile players to leave Copenhagen last summer. After six years of balancing his career with an economics degree, he graduated from the Copenhagen Business School last year.


Christian POULSEN

Age 30 (28.02.82)
Evian (Fra)
QR: 7 games/0 goals
Has played in all five of Europe's biggest leagues. Lost the captaincy and a starting place last year, but his experience of three international tournaments may be invaluable.


Jakob POULSEN

Age 28 (07.07.83)
Midtjylland
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Right-sided midfielder who has also been tried as a right-back. His only international goal secured Denmark's qualification for the 2010 World Cup.


Lasse SCHÖNE

Age 25 (27.05.86)
NEC Nijmegen (Hol)
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Despite scoring in the first minute of his international debut in 2009, he did not make the squad for South Africa two years ago. Will join Ajax when his contract with NEC expires this summer.

FORWARDS

Nicklas BENDTNER

Age 24 (16.01.88)
Arsenal (Eng)
QR: 5 games/3 goals
Though his pink boots may often have outshone his performances at Arsenal, he is a fans' favourite for his country. Has spent this season on loan at Sunderland.


Mads JUNKER

Age 31 (21.04.81)
Roda JC (Hol)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Has an impressive strike rate in Holland and would make him a useful replacement for Bendtner, but will probably find himself on the bench for much of the tournament.


Michael KROHN-DEHLI

Age 28 (06.06.83)
Brøndby
QR: 7 games/2 goals
Brøndby fans are known to serenade him with the line "you are the love of my life, you can knock up my wife", and with three goals in his last five for Denmark he's indisputably a potent force.


Tobias MIKKELSEN

Age 25 (18.09.86)
Nordsjælland
QR: 0 games
Right-winger who was underused at Brøndby before his move to Nordsjælland in 2009. Made his international debut, against Finland, in November.


Dennis ROMMEDAHL

Age 33 (22.07.78)
Brøndby
QR: 8 games/3 goals 
The winger may have lost some of his pace, but he was still a key figure in the qualifiers. Denmark's most-capped outfield player of all time, having overtaken Jon Dahl Tomasson in November.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Wide men hold the key to Olsen's attacking intent

Olsen favours a flexible, attacking 4-3-3 system, with a view to using the wide players as much as possible. Rommedahl is likely to be employed as a traditional winger on the right, while Krohn-Dehli will act as the link between the midfield and the front line on the left, with both looking to cross into Bendtner as a primary method of attack. The centre-forward may also look to hold the ball up and wait for Rommedahl on the overlap.

Eriksen completes a threatening



Jores OKORE

Age 19 (11.08.92)
Nordsjaelland
QR: 0 games
Born in the Ivorian city of Abidjan but grew up in Copenhagen. Made his debut against Sweden in November – just three months after his professional club debut.



Simon POULSEN

Age 27 (07.10.84)
AZ (Hol)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Originally a left-winger, Louis Van Gaal moved him back to full-back when in charge of the Dutch club. His own goal saw Denmark lose their opening game of the 2010 World Cup to Holland.



Daniel WASS

Age 22 (31.05.89)
Benfica (Por)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Marauding right-back, on a season-long loan with Evian in France, he has also been linked to Arsenal after impressing at last summer's Euro Under-21s.



Michael SILBERBAUER

Age 30 (07.07.81)
Young Boys (Swi)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Three-time winner of the Danish Championship during his four years with Copenhagen, the experienced midfielder is a former captain of Dutch club Utrecht.



Niki ZIMLING

Age 27 (19.04.85)
Club Brugge (Bel)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Has recently taken over from Christian Poulsen as the first-choice holding midfielder. Has been close friends with fellow midfielder Kvist since childhood.

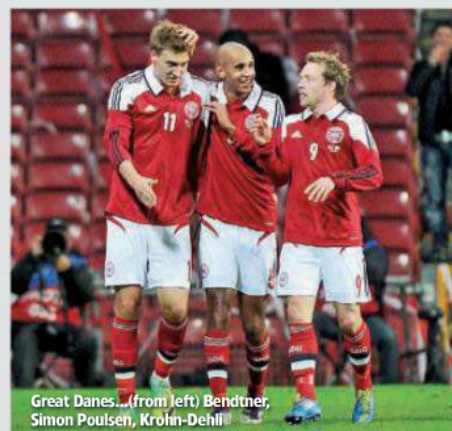
attacking quartet, playing just in front of defensive midfielders Kvist and Zimling.

Alternatively, Olsen may choose to employ a 4-2-3-1 formation, with Rommedahl and Krohn-Dehli playing slightly deeper.

Providing he remains fit, Agger will be the first-choice centre-back, leaving Kjaer and newcomer Bjelland vying for the place alongside him. In Jacobsen and Simon Poulsen, Denmark have two attack-minded full-backs.

In what will almost certainly be his last major international tournament, Sørensen will be the first-choice keeper. Should he need replacing, Andersen has the advantage over Lindegaard of regular first-team club football.

Jim Holden



Great Danes... (from left) Bendtner, Simon Poulsen, Krohn-Dehli

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER Kasper SCHMEICHEL

Leicester City (Eng)
Age 25 (05.11.86)
Caps 0
Son of Euro 92-winning keeper Peter Schmeichel.

DEFENDER Per KROLDUP

Age 32 (31.07.79)
Fiorentina (Ita)
Caps 33 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Has missed most of the season with an Achilles problem.

MIDFIELDERS Thomas ENEVOLDSEN

Age 24 (27.07.87)
Groningen (Hol)
Caps 11 (1 goal)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Was in the team that played Holland in the 2010 World Cup, but has not started an international since 2010.

Daniel JENSEN

Age 32 (25.06.79)
Novara (Ita)
Caps 52 (3 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Was in the squad for both the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2004.

Martin JORGENSEN

Age 36 (06.10.75)
Aarhus
Caps 102 (12 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
The Serie A veteran has a wealth of experience but is unlikely to be picked above the likes of Rommedahl and Krohn-Dehli.

Thomas KAHLENBERG

Age 29 (20.03.83)
Wolfsburg (Ger)
Caps 36 (4 goals)
QR: 1 game/1 goal
Has been on loan to French club Evian this season.

Martin VINGAARD

Age 27 (20.03.85)
Copenhagen
Caps 9 (1 goal)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
A three-time Danish title winner and nominated for the Danish player of the year award in 2010.

FORWARDS Nicolai JORGENSEN

Age 21 (15.01.91)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 goals
Joined Kaiserslautern on loan earlier this year.

Nicklas PEDERSEN

Age 24 (10.10.87)
Groningen (Hol)
Caps 7 (2 goals)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Not currently a regular starter with his club side.

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Off...Rooney is dismissed in England's
final qualifier, in Montenegro



ENGLAND

Reality bites

For once England's fans are realistic about their chances



GAVIN HAMILTON
in London

As the former England boss Sven Goran Eriksson might say: "First half good, second half not so good." After a successful qualifying campaign, England's plans for Euro 2012 were thrown into disarray by the abrupt departure in February of manager Fabio Capello and the subsequent delay in naming a successor.

At the time of writing, with less than six weeks to go before the tournament kick-off, the Football Association were close to appointing Roy Hodgson as manager. The uncertainty over the managerial situation had only added to England's problems, which included their main striker, Wayne Rooney, being suspended for the first two matches of the tournament; and their brightest hope, Jack Wilshere, being ruled out through injury.

Fans have voted with their wallets, too, purchasing just over half of the 6,000 tickets allocated to the Football Association for England's first game, against France in Donetsk. While the prohibitive cost of flights and hotels in Ukraine has clearly been a factor, the lack of enthusiasm reflects a general mood of pessimism regarding England's chances.

Such a negative outlook may have played a role in prompting Capello, appearing on Italian TV, to criticise the FA's decision to strip John Terry of the England captaincy after the defender was charged with racially abusing Anton Ferdinand during a Premier League match. FA chairman David Bernstein acted swiftly in demanding the Italian's departure.

Relations between Capello and many key sections of English football, including the media

and club managers, had strained to almost breaking point. The Terry dispute offered Capello – and the FA – a convenient way out of his £6million-a-year contract.

Following Capello's acrimonious exit, the FA refused to be rushed into hiring a replacement. Capello's assistant Stuart Pearce, who was already working overtime as Great Britain Olympic manager and England under-21 boss, was installed as caretaker.

Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Redknapp was the bookies' favourite but Spurs' form nosedived after he became linked with the England job. But it appears the FA had other ideas, with Hodgson as its only target, and was not prepared to enter negotiations with Tottenham over compensation for Redknapp.

In contrast, Hodgson is out of contract with West Bromwich Albion, and thus available at a much lower cost to the FA. Hodgson, an intelligent man and notable tactician, has vast international experience and will also relish the challenge of developing England's new national football centre in Burton-upon-Trent.

Difficult decisions

If confirmed as manager, Hodgson faces a number of difficult decisions. Most importantly, he has to tackle the Terry situation. The former captain is due in court in July to face charges of racially abusing Anton Ferdinand and many have argued that it would be best to leave Terry out of the England squad until the case is resolved. In past tournaments, Terry has formed an effective partnership with Rio Ferdinand, Anton's brother, but that may

GROUP

11.06.12	France (Donetsk, Ukr)
15.06.12	Sweden (Kiev, Ukr)
19.06.12	Ukraine (Donetsk, Ukr)

now be impossible in the circumstances.

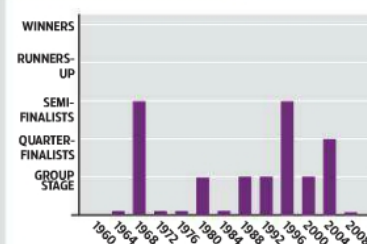
The new manager must also prepare a game plan for the first two games without Rooney, and for when he returns. And he needs to resolve the issue of right-back, where there are a number of candidates for the starting role.

On a more fundamental level, he must decide whether to pick a squad with purely Euro 2012 in mind, or take a longer term view and select youngsters who could play a major role in the 2014 World Cup campaign.

Injuries have already ruled out Wilshere, as well as Aston Villa striker Darren Bent and young Everton midfielder Jack Rodwell. There are likely to be others in the build-up to the finals, further reducing expectations.

That may be no bad thing. The case of Denmark in 1992 offers an example of how success can be achieved from the most unpromising of circumstances. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP G

03.09.10	Bulgaria (h)	4-0
07.09.10	Switzerland (a)	3-1
12.10.10	Montenegro (h)	0-0
26.03.11	Wales (a)	2-0
04.06.11	Switzerland (h)	2-2
02.09.11	Bulgaria (a)	3-0
06.09.11	Wales (h)	1-0
07.10.11	Montenegro (a)	2-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	8	5	3	0	17	5	18
Montenegro	8	3	3	2	7	7	12
Switzerland	8	3	2	3	12	10	11
Wales	8	3	0	5	6	10	9
Bulgaria	8	1	2	5	3	13	5

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Holland (h)	2-3
26.05.12	Norway (a)	
02.06.12	Belgium (h)	

BASE CAMP





Confident...playing regularly has improved Parker as a player

Scott Parker

“Maybe less hype will help us...in past tournaments there has been a hell of a lot of expectation”

Fans are showing an unusually pessimistic attitude towards England's chances at Euro 2012. Is this disappointing or, perversely, quite liberating?

It's difficult to say – I guess you can look at it both ways. I do think we have every right to be confident we can put together some good performances. We're a good team and should always remember that fact. Maybe less hype will help us though. Who knows? In previous tournaments there has been a hell of a lot of expectation.

What can people expect from England at the tournament?

You'll see a group of players giving everything for their country. You can't ask more than that. Sure it'll be tough because you could say this tournament will be harder than the World Cup to win. The likes of Spain, Germany, France, Holland and I'd say ourselves – the list goes on – are all top sides.

But can England win Euro 2012?

I always say that anything can happen in football. I probably know better than most that things can change very quickly. I wasn't really part of it [the

England set-up] less than 18 months ago and now, thankfully, I'm playing games and looking forward to the Euros. So yeah, of course we can win it. We came through a tough qualification group and achieved our goal. That was fantastic. At the same time I'm not going to sit here and make any grand claims or predictions. I'm just focusing on one game at a time, just like I always do.

Spain seem imperious though...

They are probably the favourites and deservedly so. But I have to be honest and say there won't be any fear towards them or any of the other teams. As individuals and as a group we should look forward to testing ourselves against the very best.

Contrary to the criticism aimed at some of your colleagues, you seem genuinely proud to pull on the England shirt...

Who wouldn't be? Every young boy would love to have the honour of representing their country and I'm no different. Neither are my team-mates, I'm sure. Maybe it means a lot to me because I spent so long on the fringes and couldn't seem to get over that final

hurdle. Now I'm part of things I'll do everything to ensure I stay there.

Are you a throwback to a different era of football?

I'm not sure what that means. I play the game for the love of it, not all the other stuff, if that's the question. Maybe I'm old-fashioned or just boring!

But you must enjoy the “British Bulldog” tag?

If it means people think I'm giving everything, I'll take it. I just know my qualities, what I can and can't do. My job is to get about the opposition, close down the space, get the tackles in and then hopefully find a team-mate with a pass. I appreciate my role and just get on with it without, hopefully, too much fuss.

What is the difference between the Scott Parker of, say, two years ago and the one we see now?

I'm a more confident footballer. Although relegation at West Ham was painful, the experience of playing every week, learning more about my game was important. Maybe as a young man I'd worry too much about things. Today I never take anything for granted but I also think I belong at this level. It took a while for that mindset to sink in. I'm just glad I got there in the end.

Interview by Frank Tennyson

THE VIEW FROM ENGLAND



“England have one big advantage this time: expectations have never been so low, so the usual mixture of bravado and nerves should not apply. Playing without Rooney could have a good effect. Just as losing him in Portugal [in 2004] had a bad effect, so getting him back could give everybody a lift. So out of the chaos could come something quite positive”

Patrick Barclay, Evening Standard columnist



“England usually reach the knockout stages then go out to the first good team they meet. There is no reason to expect this record to improve. Expectations are lower than for many years, which may help the team relax. But with barely a month to go the team did not have a manager. Rooney is suspended, Wilshere injured, Terry has a cloud over him, and there is no cover in goal”

Glenn Moore, Independent football editor



“England fans have never been more realistic about the team's chances. Uncertainty over the manager, 46 years of hurt, and the realisation that many players are exhausted come summer has tempered the usual ‘we can win it’ hype. England have only three top-class players: Joe Hart, Ashley Cole and Wayne Rooney – and Rooney is suspended for the first two games. The wild card could be Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain: quick, intelligent and with a good touch. Quarter-finals at best”

Henry Winter, Daily Telegraph football correspondent

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GOALKEEPERS



4
0

Scott CARSON

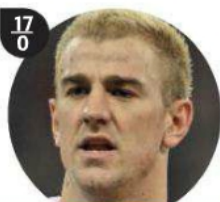
Age 26 (03.09.85)
Bursaspor (Tur)
QR: 0 games
The former under-21 made his debut in November 2007 but was dropped a week later after his mistake led to Croatia's first goal in a Euro 2008 qualifying defeat.



11
0

Robert GREEN

Age 32 (18.01.80)
West Ham United
QR: 0 games
Former first choice who was dropped following his failure to stop a speculative shot from the USA's Clint Dempsey at the 2010 World Cup. Climbed Mount Kilimanjaro for charity.



17
0

Joe HART

Age 25 (19.04.87)
Manchester City
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Made his England debut in June 2008 and, despite his relative inexperience, quickly established himself. A promising cricketer as a teenager. Joe is his middle name, his first name is actually Charles.

DEFENDERS



7
0

Leighton BAINES

Age 27 (11.12.84)
Everton
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Left-back who is recovering from a hamstring injury picked up in the FA Cup semi-final defeat by Liverpool. An indie music fan, he writes a music blog on the Everton website.



8
2

Gary CAHILL

Age 26 (19.12.85)
Chelsea
QR: 4 games/1 goal
Imposing centre-back with good positional sense who made his England debut in September 2010 and has cemented his place since a January 2012 move from Bolton Wanderers to Chelsea.



93
0

Ashley COLE

Age 31 (20.12.80)
Chelsea
QR: 8 games/0 goals
One of the world's best left-backs. Not popular with opposing teams' fans but has excelled in Chelsea's cup runs this season. Divorced from singer Cheryl Cole.



81
3

Rio FERDINAND

Age 33 (07.11.78)
Manchester United
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Central defender with good positional sense and comfortable in possession but suffers lapses in concentration. Increasingly injury prone. As a kid he went to ballet classes four times a week.



35
1

Glen JOHNSON

Age 27 (23.08.84)
Liverpool
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Right-back who made his debut in 2005 but fell out of favour until recalled by Fabio Capello after maturing into a fine attacking defender at Liverpool. Has also played at left-back for his club.

MIDFIELDERS



52
3

Gareth BARRY

Age 31 (23.02.81)
Manchester City
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Made his England debut in May 2000 but only became a regular under Steve McClaren and continued to be an important figure following a \$12m move from Aston Villa to Man City in 2009.



90
19

Steven GERRARD

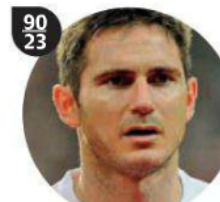
Age 31 (30.05.80)
Liverpool
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Possible captain following Terry's demotion. Troubled by injuries in recent times but a potential match winner with fierce shot and well-timed runs. Played against cousin Anthony in the League Cup Final.



4
0

Phil JONES

Age 20 (21.02.92)
Manchester United
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Has enjoyed a rapid rise since moving from Blackburn Rovers last summer. Centre-back for United but played right-back on his England debut and has also been tried in central midfield.



90
23

Frank LAMPARD

Age 33 (20.06.78)
Chelsea
QR: 5 games/2 goals
Now approaching veteran status, his passing, rather than his trademark late runs into the box, have been showcased in Chelsea's run to the Champions League Final. Nephew of Tottenham's Harry Redknapp.



24
0

James MILNER

Age 26 (04.01.86)
Manchester City
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Combative, versatile operator who can play across midfield and at full-back but not a regular for City this season. Played cricket for Yorkshire schools and was also a teenage 100m champion.

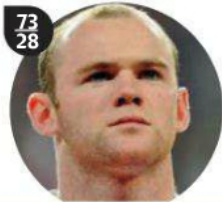
FORWARDS



3
1

Andy CARROLL

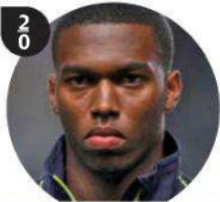
Age 23 (06.01.89)
Liverpool
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Powerful, old-style centre-forward who has struggled since his £35m move from his native Newcastle in January 2011. His winning goal in the FA Cup semi-final over Everton could be the boost he needs.



73
28

Wayne ROONEY

Age 27 (24.10.84)
Manchester United
QR: 7 games/3 goals
Suspended for the first two games of Euro 2012 after his red card for violent conduct against Montenegro in the qualifiers but still England's most important player. Nicknamed "Shrek" by rival fans.



2
0

Daniel STURRIDGE

Age 22 (01.09.89)
Chelsea
QR: 0 games
Can play centrally or wide. Excelled on loan at Bolton Wanderers last year but has spent a lot of time on the bench at Chelsea recently. Nephew of former professionals Dean and Simon Sturridge.



22
3

Theo WALCOTT

Age 23 (16.03.89)
Arsenal
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Aside from a hat-trick against Croatia (his only England goals), he has yet to repeat his club form for his country. Included in the 2006 World Cup squad but did not play. Has written two books for children.



4
0

Danny WELBECK

Age 21 (26.11.90)
Manchester United
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Manchester-born youngster who has enjoyed plenty of opportunities for United this season after last year's successful loan at Sunderland. Started February's friendly against Holland.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Delay in appointing a manager, plus Rooney's ban, causes disruption

Until England announce who is to lead them at the Euros it is difficult to predict how England will line up against France in their opening game.

Terry and Ferdinand have been a solid central defensive partnership in the past, but Cahill's performances in Chelsea's Champions League run may give him the edge over injury-prone Ferdinand.

In central midfield, Parker is the obvious choice for a defensive holding role, the



Joleon LESCOTT

Age 29 (16.08.82)
Manchester City
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Centre-back who was given his debut by Steve McClaren in 2007. Can also play at left-back. Facial scar is the result of a childhood car crash.



John TERRY

Age 31 (07.12.80)
Chelsea
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Former captain who is due in court in July to hear charges of racially abusing QPR's Anton Ferdinand. A key figure in Chelsea's cup runs this season but will miss the Champions League Final through suspension.



Kyle WALKER

Age 21 (28.05.90)
Tottenham Hotspur
QR: 0 games
Pacy, forward-thinking right-back who is this year's PFA young player of the year. Has made a rapid rise since being sent on loan to Aston Villa last season.

position in which he has excelled under Redknapp at Spurs. Lampard, Redknapp's nephew, and Barry are the leading candidates for a second central midfield berth in a 4-2-3-1 formation, the system favoured by Capello and his immediate successor as caretaker, Stuart Pearce.

With Rooney suspended for the opening two group games, the choice of a lone forward is limited, with Welbeck likely to get the nod.

When Rooney returns for the final group match the formation is likely to change to 4-3-3, with him as a central striker, partnered by Walcott, Young or Sturridge. Gerrard and Lampard or Barry would then join a midfield three anchored by Parker.

Gavin Hamilton



Scott PARKER

Age 31 (13.10.80)
Tottenham Hotspur
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Tenacious central midfielder who made his debut in 2003. Named player of 2010-11 by football writers. At 13, he appeared playing football in McDonald's TV ad. Captain against Holland in February.



Ashley YOUNG

Age 26 (09.07.85)
Manchester United
QR: 7 games/3 goals
Winger who can also play off the main striker. England's most effective player in the final qualifying matches.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

David STOCKDALE

Age 26 (20.09.85)
Fulham
Caps 0
Picked as a reserve by Capello.

DEFENDERS

Kieron GIBBS

Age 22 (26.11.89)
Arsenal
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Left-back whose progress has been interrupted by injuries.

Phil JAGIELKA

Age 29 (17.08.82)
Everton
Caps 10 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Strong centre-back.

Micah RICHARDS

Age 23 (24.06.88)
Manchester City
Caps 13 (1 goal)
QR: 0 games
Right-back overlooked by Capello, he can also play in the centre.

Chris SMALLING

Age 22 (22.11.89)
Manchester United
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Right-back or centre-back who has enjoyed a rapid rise from non-league in the past two years.

MIDFIELDERS

Leon BRITTON

Age 29 (16.09.82)
Swansea City (Wal)
Caps 0
A wildcard perhaps, but the most effective passer in the Premier League this season.

Michael CARRICK

Age 30 (28.07.81)
Manchester United
Caps 22 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
A clever passer, he fell out of favour with Capello.

Tom CLEVERLEY

Age 22 (12.08.89)
Manchester United
Caps 0
An impressive start to the season was disrupted by injury.



Overlooked...Richards



Erratic...Downing

Paul SCHOLES

Age 37 (16.11.74)
Manchester United
Caps 66 (14 goals)
QR: 0 games
Veteran who retired last season, only to return for United this year. Redknapp is a big fan.

FORWARDS

Fraizer CAMPBELL

Age 24 (13.09.87)
Sunderland
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Recovered from serious injury to impress for Sunderland in the latter part of this season.

Peter CROUCH

Age 31 (30.01.81)
Stoke City
Caps 42 (22 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Slipped down the pecking order since his move to Stoke.

Jermain DEFOE

Age 29 (07.10.82)
Tottenham Hotspur
Caps 46 (15 goals)
QR: 2 games/3 goals
Excellent finisher but out of favour at Spurs this season.

Grant HOLT

Age 31 (12.04.81)
Norwich City
Caps 0
Journeyman striker who has hit fine form for Norwich this term.

Stewart DOWNING

Age 27 (22.07.84)
Liverpool
Caps 33 (0 goals)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Winger whose performances for Liverpool have been erratic, but a good option to deliver crosses from the left.

Adam JOHNSON

Age 24 (14.07.87)
Manchester City
Caps 10 (2 goals)
QR: 5 games/2 goals
Winger and former under-21 star.

Alex OXLADE-CHAMBERLAIN

Age 18 (15.08.93)
Arsenal
Caps 0
Inexperienced winger who has broken through this season.

Mercurial...Ribery is brought down to earth by defender Eric Hoffmann in Luxembourg's Stade Josy Barthel during qualifying





FRANCE

Restoring national pride

Blanc's *Les Bleus* aim to put 2010 nightmare behind them



HOWARD JOHNSON
in Paris

France can't justifiably be seen as one of the favourites for Euro 2012, but they have more than enough at their disposal to be an enticing outside bet. And in Laurent Blanc they have a great thinker with a vast knowledge of European football, having played for clubs in France, Italy, Spain and England.

While Blanc may not be experienced internationally as a coach, he has already shown he can cut the mustard; and under his guidance France are unbeaten in their last 18 games – a run going back to their first Euro 2012 qualifier, back in September 2010.

On the down side, *Les Bleus* also had excellent players at their disposal for Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup, yet still made an absolute hash of both competitions. But while there are no cast-iron guarantees they won't implode for a third time, it looks unlikely.

Blanc has worked hard to bring in players with not only ability but also the right character. The likes of Adil Rami, skipper Hugo Lloris, Yohan Cabaye and Marvin Martin might have a lesser international profile than the members of some previous France squads, but they are honest and talented players who possess grit as well as guile.

That more humble attitude helped France come through what was at times a difficult qualifying campaign. After losing their opening match, at home to Belarus, the knives were out for Blanc, but four successive wins calmed shattered nerves. After hard-fought draws in Belarus and Romania, sandwiched around an important victory in Albania, France finished off with two home games – with victory over

Albania teeing up a winner-takes-all showdown with Bosnia & Herzegovina.

France were on 20 points, the visitors on 19, and things didn't look good when Edin Dzeko put Bosnia ahead after 40 minutes. But France kept their cool and Dzeko's Manchester City team-mate Samir Nasri picked himself up after he was fouled in the box to convert a vital penalty on 78 minutes. The game finished 1-1 and France were through as group winners, condemning Bosnia to the play-offs.

The French press weren't always kind to Blanc or his team during the qualifiers, but making it to the finals and only losing once along the way was still an impressive achievement from the rookie national coach. Now, though, the naturally competitive Blanc will want his team to show they have improved when they get to the Euros.

Tournament fragility

Although Group D is not the hardest in the competition, progress to the knockout stage is anything but a foregone conclusion and much will hinge on the first game, against England in Donetsk. If France can overcome the English with the same ease as the last time the two met – at Wembley in 2010, when France won 2-1 and dominated the game – then confidence will soar and they could be a team to look out for. If they lose, that often-seen tournament fragility could emerge and create doubt in the camp.

On paper, the French look good. The central defensive partnership of Rami and Philippe Mexes seems assured, while Yann M'Vila is a real powerhouse defensive midfielder. There

GROUP D

11.06.12	England (Donetsk, Ukr)
15.06.12	Ukraine (Donetsk, Ukr)
19.06.12	Sweden (Kiev, Ukr)

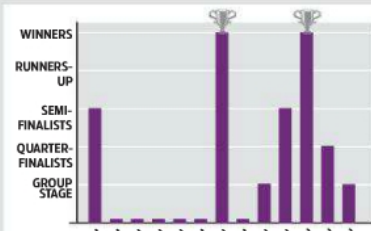
is also plenty of creativity, particularly with the mercurial Franck Ribery coming off the back of a great season with Bayern Munich. And although Nasri hasn't been at his best for Manchester City in the Premier League this season, you wouldn't bet against him coming good in the summer.

The big question is what happens if Karim Benzema gets injured? Will the French have enough experienced firepower?

After embarrassing the nation at the 2010 World Cup with the infamous "players strike" incident, the French squad and management know they must represent the country with dignity and integrity in 2012.

And that might just give them the necessary rigour to pose a serious threat. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP D

03.09.10	Belarus (h)	0-1
07.09.10	Bosnia & Herzegovina (a)	2-0
09.10.10	Romania (h)	2-0
12.10.10	Luxembourg (h)	2-0
25.03.11	Luxembourg (a)	2-0
03.06.11	Belarus (a)	1-1
02.09.11	Albania (a)	2-1
06.09.11	Romania (a)	0-0
07.10.11	Albania (h)	3-0
11.10.11	Bosnia & Herzegovina (h)	1-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	10	6	3	1	15	4	21
Bosnia & H	10	6	2	2	17	8	20
Romania	10	3	5	2	13	9	14
Belarus	10	3	4	3	8	7	13
Albania	10	2	3	5	7	14	9
Luxembourg	10	1	1	8	3	21	4

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Germany (a)	2-1
27.05.12	Iceland (h)	
31.05.12	Serbia (h)	
05.06.12	Estonia (h)	

BASE CAMP



Laurent Blanc

“What happened in 2010, with the player strike, it really hurt our sport deeply. The image of the French team was horribly compromised”

Are you happy with the draw?

Well, we were in the fourth pot, so we knew we were going to be drawn with two of the top seeds. We could have got Holland, Spain or Germany, so to have avoided all of them – teams that have serious aspirations of winning the tournament – has to be a good thing. But you've still got to prove yourself on the pitch.

Is it difficult to be in a group with a host nation?

It's never easy to play a host nation. The Ukraine will have the support of their public behind them. That will count in their favour. We played them last year and I thought they were a decent team. We did win 4-1 that day, but it was only in the last 10 minutes that we really came through, so we're expecting a difficult match.

You've taken part in big tournaments as an international player, of course. Will that help you at Euro 2012?

Yes, it will. I'm not saying that it's indispensable, but I think it is a plus. If you've already been through something, then that experience counts. So I think that having done that helps me a lot, even if it offers no guarantees. It can certainly be useful in your day-to-day dealings, in preparing properly and in helping you to anticipate the kind of problems you might face.

You gave England a bit of a lesson the last time the two countries met, at Wembley in 2010. Have they improved since then?

To be honest the England we saw that night wasn't the real England because they had a few key players out injured. There's a certain rivalry when the two countries meet; a certain pleasure that we take in beating the English and they likewise in beating us. And that means they're always really tight games.

Do you think the uncertainty that surrounds the England manager's position will have a negative effect on them at Euro 2012?

It cuts both ways because there's no such thing as the ideal circumstances going into a tournament. The Danes came together at the very last moment in 1992 because they hadn't even qualified – it was only when Yugoslavia

couldn't compete that they were admitted – and they ended up winning the tournament. I suspect it's better to have a smooth and hassle-free preparation, of course, but it's no guarantee that you'll get the results.

What about Sweden?

They're a decent team that can beat the very best on any given day. We know a few of their guys because they've played here in France, so we know all about their qualities. They have elements of the English footballing culture, with tough players, yet they're very technical at the same time. And let's not forget that they have an exceptional player up front in [Zlatan] Ibrahimovic. They've got a lot of quality and you have to take them seriously. Believe me, I take them very seriously.

The national team was in complete disarray when you took over. How did you manage to reconstruct the team so efficiently?

It wasn't easy. We had a hard time understanding what happened in 2010 with the player strike and it really hurt our sport deeply. The image of French football and the French team was horribly compromised. Clearly the best

way of getting over all of that was to qualify for the Euros. I had to mix older and younger players and fix a common objective, which was qualification. But there was also an objective that was more about the social side of things – and that was to rebuild our image.

You've already beaten Germany this year. Does that mean you can win the tournament?

Sincerely, at this moment in time, no. It's not a lack of ambition that makes me say that, but I am realistic. In any given game one team can beat another, but it's more difficult in a tournament. But once the tournament gets underway we'll all be trying very hard to win it.

Interview by Howard Johnson

COACH'S RECORD



Blanc lost his first game in charge of France – a friendly against Norway in August 2010 – but he is currently on a run of 18 games without defeat.



P	W	D	L
20	12	6	2



Realist...Blanc has set about rebuilding the image of Les Bleus



Settled...the midfielder has played in 10 of Blanc's 20 games as coach

Yohan Cabaye

“The full-on nature of the Premier League is really helpful when it comes to being ready to play at international level”

You earned your first call-up to the national team in August 2010 under somewhat bizarre circumstances...

It was definitely different. It wasn't long after the infamous player strike that happened during the 2010 World Cup. Laurent Blanc had just taken over from Raymond Domenech and wanted to show how we all understood that what had happened in South Africa was not what anyone wanted to see. So for his first game in charge he selected 23 players, none of whom had been in South Africa. It was a definite statement. We lost 2-1 and I only got on for about 15 to 20 minutes, so I just tried to keep things as simple as possible and not make any mistakes. It's tough when you only play for a short period of time and I don't think I did particularly well, to be honest. But Laurent called me up again, so I can't have done too badly.

And now you're an integral member of a national squad that hasn't lost for 18 matches...

We're on a long unbeaten run and that's great, of course, but to be frank we were poor at both of the last two major international tournaments, the World Cup in 2010 and the Euros in 2008.

How do you think you've played in recent internationals?

I think I've done OK. The most important thing for me is to show when

I'm out on the pitch that Laurent can count on me to work hard and to show that I have the necessary ability.

Did moving from Lille to Newcastle United last summer help your international ambitions?

It's definitely helped me being at Newcastle because there are a lot of great players and full internationals there. Every game we play is hugely intense. You come up against big teams all the time, strong teams, and there are no easy matches. I've learnt a lot. Playing in midfield in England is a real lung-buster! In France there's a lot more emphasis on the tactical side of the game, but the full-on nature of football in the Premier League is really helpful when it comes to being ready to play at international level.

How do you feel about Group D, where you have been drawn with England, Ukraine and Sweden?

It's a difficult group, but it's probably fair to say that there are tougher groups in the competition. The Ukraine will be a strong team. They're at home and that will count for a lot. We beat them last year, but it wasn't at all easy. And then you've got Sweden, who are traditionally powerful and have one of the world's great players in [Zlatan] Ibrahimovic. Of course, we'll be going into the group looking to win our matches and we'll be

very determined. For me, England are the favourites, but after that we'll see.

Do you really think England are favourites ahead of France?

Well they're the first team we come up against and they're likely to be the most difficult to beat. Yes they have some uncertainty surrounding their coach, but for me England have great players who are all very dangerous. We'll have to prepare well for the game and we'll have to play well if we want to win and get our campaign off to a good start.

How do you see things going for you personally this summer?

It's my first big competition so I don't really know what to expect, to be honest. But I'll definitely be giving it my all and I'd like to think that we'll behave well and represent our country in the right way. The first objective is to qualify from our group, of course. Anything can happen in a single match and we've seen that with the French team recently. We've beaten some big teams since the World Cup – England, Brazil, Germany – so we know that we can do it.

So can France win Euro 2012?

Personally, I fancy Spain, Holland and Germany. But then again, who doesn't? It will be hard for us. We've come a long way in a short time and it's a hugely difficult competition to win. There are a lot of other countries who are much bigger favourites than we are. But we'll be going to the Euros with plenty of ambition and if we can get through the group phase, then why not? Anything can happen.

Interview by Howard Johnson

THE VIEW FROM FRANCE



“The French team hasn't suddenly gone from a declining outfit to the status of a genuine candidate for the Euro 2012 title. But we can certainly aim to get out of Group D where neither England, nor Sweden, nor the Ukraine appear to be any better than us right now. Qualifying for the quarter-finals looks like a minimum objective”

Guillaume Loisy, Le Figaro

“We can't say right now that the French team are among the favourites for the Euros, but at least we know that they're not the bunch of dunces we thought they were a few months ago. We now know that they've got a chance”

Patrick Dessault, France Football

“France's win against Germany in the last match before the announcement of our squad for Euro 2012 was a big statement. Before that game we weren't sure whether we'd be doubting how well we could do or whether we'd be feeling fairly confident. Now we know we have real hope and we're full of confidence”

Emery Taisne, L'Equipe

GOALKEEPERS



1
0

Cedric CARRASSO

Age 30 (30.12.81)
Bordeaux
QR: 0 games
Third choice, he made his debut against Poland in June last year. Went to the World Cup in 2010 but had to withdraw with a thigh injury.



31
0

Hugo LLORIS

Age 25 (26.12.86)
Lyon
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Will captain the side at Euro 2012. A mature presence and a tough competitor, he has his own "Spitting Image" puppet on French TV.



14
0

Steve MANDANDA

Age 27 (28.03.85)
Marseille
QR: 0 games
Born in Congo DR, he captained France against Euro opponents Ukraine in June 2011. Has slipped behind Lloris as first choice, but is considered by some to be the better of the two.

COACH

Laurent BLANC

Age 46 (19.11.65)
France coach since July 2010
The former defender took charge of the national team after Les Bleus' disastrous 2010 World Cup campaign under Raymond Domenech in which France failed to win a single game in South Africa. Nicknamed "Le President" during his playing days at Marseille in tribute to his leadership skills, he won the 1998 World Cup and 2000 Euros before beginning his coaching career with Bordeaux. Led his side to the French title and League Cup in his second season in management.



DEFENDERS



3
0

Mathieu DEBUCHY

Age 26 (28.07.85)
Lille
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Put himself into the Euro 2012 picture after a fine performance at right-back against Germany in February, when he set up both French goals. Hopes to join a bigger club this summer.



39
0

Patrice EVRA

Age 30 (15.05.81)
Manchester United (Eng)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Born in Senegal, he was suspended for five matches after his part in the players' strike at the 2010 World Cup. Now looks set to feature in Euro 2012 as a result of Eric Abidal's health problems.



1
0

Laurent KOSCIELNY

Age 26 (10.09.85)
Arsenal (Eng)
QR: 0 games
Has had a solid season in the heart of the Arsenal defence, having joined from Lorient in 2010. Made his France debut last November, against the US. Had also been eligible to play for Poland.



23
1

Philippe MEXES

Age 30 (30.03.82)
Milan (Ita)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Tough and talented central defender who has found favour with Blanc after a heavily disrupted last year with injury. Moved to Italian champions Milan this season after seven years with Roma.



17
0

Adil RAMI

Age 26 (27.12.85)
Valencia (Spa)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Was working as an odd-job man for the local council when signed by Lille in 2006 and has since proved a talented central defender. Has settled well in Spain after arriving at Valencia last summer.

MIDFIELDERS



10
0

Yohan CABAYE

Age 26 (14.01.86)
Newcastle United (Eng)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Helped Lille to a league and cup double in 2011 before signing a five-year deal with Newcastle. Established himself in the France side towards the end of last year.



38
0

Alou DIARRA

Age 30 (15.07.81)
Marseille
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Despite struggling to find his best form all season, Blanc made him captain for a couple of qualifiers. His know-how and experience make him a good squad member.



74
8

Florent MALOUDA

Age 31 (13.06.80)
Chelsea (Eng)
QR: 9 games/3 goals
Was the only Frenchman to score at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and also notched a goal in the impressive away win against Germany in February.



9
2

Marvin MARTIN

Age 24 (10.01.88)
Sochaux
QR: 4 games/0 goals
A diminutive and industrious attacking midfielder who marked his international debut by scoring twice against Ukraine in June 2011 after appearing in the 76th minute.



18
1

Yann M'VILA

Age 21 (26.06.90)
Rennes
QR: 8 games/1 goal
A tough and uncompromising defensive midfielder who not only wins the ball but also distributes it intelligently. Likely to join a bigger club this summer.

FORWARDS



42
13

Karim BENZEMA

Age 24 (19.12.87)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 7 games/13 goals
Inexplicably failed to make the cut for the 2010 World Cup. Notched the most goals ever scored by a Frenchman in a La Liga campaign this season and expected to make a big impression at Euro 2012.



3
1

Olivier GIROUD

Age 25 (30.09.86)
Montpellier
QR: 0 games
Likely to be France's wild card up front, the lanky striker only made his full debut in November but has been scoring regularly at club level. On target against Germany in February's friendly.



10
0

Jeremy MENEZ

Age 24 (07.05.87)
Paris Saint-Germain
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Returned to the French league last summer, joining PSG, the club he supported as a boy, after three years in Italy with Roma. Can also play in midfield.



17
4

Loic REMY

Age 25 (02.01.87)
Marseille
QR: 7 games/2 goals
Joined Marseille from Nice in 2010, but only after the club's medical team detected a heart problem that was later deemed insignificant. Blanc admires both his clinical eye for goal and his work ethic.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Blanc's *Les Bleus* have solid foundations for success this summer

Blanc has been fairly consistent in his tactical thinking during his time in charge of *Les Bleus*, generally preferring a flat back four with two defensive midfielders providing a blanket of cover. Three quick, technically gifted attacking midfielders then provide both ammunition and support to a lone striker.

It is a system that provides solid foundations and dynamism, but also demands a high level of fitness so that defence can quickly be turned into attack. Blanc will feel confident that he



4-2-3-1



Anthony REVEILLERE

Age 32 (10.11.79)
Lyon

QR: 5 games/1 goal

Right-back who has been an international for 10 years and is back in favour under Blanc. Can also operate on the left, which makes him an attractive proposition for tournament football.



Bacary SAGNA

Age 29 (14.02.83)
Arsenal (Eng)

QR: 5 games/0 goals

Experienced right-back who has struggled with injury this season, only returning to action in January after breaking a leg against Arsenal's north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.



Mamadou SAKHO

Age 22 (13.02.90)
Paris Saint-Germain

QR: 1 game/0 goals

Voted the most promising young French player by his fellow pros last year, he is yet to prove his worth at international level. Once slapped a journalist who wrote something bad about him.



Samir NASRI

Age 24 (26.06.87)
Manchester City (Eng)

QR: 8 games/1 goal

Blanc has kept faith with the playmaker despite a so-so first season with Manchester City. Scored the important equalising penalty against Bosnia that sealed qualification for Euro 2012.



Franck RIBERY

Age 29 (07.04.83)
Bayern Munich (Ger)

QR: 4 games/0 goals

A complicated man whose sublime talents make the game look easy. However, he has suffered from negative press, the fallout from South Africa and various injury problems recently.



Mathieu VALBUENA

Age 27 (28.09.84)
Marseille

Caps 10 (2 goals)

QR: 4 games/0 goals
Diminutive, with good technique and a decent eye for goal. Scored against England at Wembley in November 2010.

has a good squad with excellent cover in all positions. If he loses players to injury during the tournament there are others of equal ability waiting in the wings and he will still feel upbeat if he needs to start a game with Martin, Debuchy, Reveillere or Diarra, for example.

The only area where Blanc might feel underpowered is up front, where Benzema is by some distance his best striker. But even then, Remy or Giroud have enough about them to make a name for themselves if things go their way.

The balance of the squad looks right, the spirit under Blanc appears good, the team have developed a winning habit and, as much as anything, they have much to prove after a 2010 World Cup disaster. All in all, they should do well.

Howard Johnson

Potential...Giroud



ALSO IN CONTENTION

DEFENDERS Gael CLICHY

Age 26 (26.07.85)
Manchester City (Eng)

Caps 11 (0 goals)

QR: 4 games/0 goals
Has fallen down the pecking order recently, but could make the squad as a replacement for Eric Abidal.

Younes KABOUL

Age 26 (04.01.86)
Tottenham (Eng)

Caps 5 (1 goal)

QR: 2 games/0 goals
Rugged central defender of Moroccan origin with a thumping free-kick.

Jeremy MATHIEU

Age 28 (29.10.83)
Valencia (Spa)

Caps 1 (0 goals)

QR: 0 games

Left-sided defender who made his debut in September of 2011.

MIDFIELDERS Morgan AMALFITANO

Age 27 (20.03.85)
Marseille

Caps 1 (0 goals)

QR: 0 games

Made his debut against Germany in February.

Abou DIABY

Age 25 (11.05.86)
Arsenal (Eng)

Caps 15 (0 goals)

QR: 4 games/0 goals

After an injury-hit season, he could be fresh and fit for the Euros.

Yoann GOURCUFF

Age 25 (11.07.86)
Lyon

Caps 28 (4 goals)

QR: 3 games/3 goals

Playmaker who has had a torrid time with injuries and loss of form since joining Lyon in August 2010.

FORWARDS Matem BEN ARFA

Age 25 (07.03.87)
Newcastle United (Eng)

Caps 8 (2 goals)

QR: 0 games

Coming into some real late-season form after suffering a broken leg in October 2010.

Kevin GAMEIRO

Age 24 (09.05.87)
Paris Saint-Germain

Caps 8 (1 goal)

QR: 2 games/0 goals

A short, robust hustler who could have represented Portugal through his paternal grandfather.

Bafetimbi GOMIS

Age 26 (06.08.85)
Lyon

Caps 6 (2 goals)

QR: 1 game/0 goals

Has consistently found the net at club level this season.

Louis SAHA

Age 33 (08.08.78)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)

Caps 20 (4 goals)

QR: 1 game/0 goals

Enjoying a new lease of life since joining Tottenham in January.

Threat...Klose, getting the better of Holland's Nigel De Jong (left) and John Heitinga during Germany's 3-0 friendly win in November, is tipped to be leading scorer at the Euro finals



GERMANY Bridesmaids no longer

Low's young side have what it takes to be winners this time



NICK BIDWELL
in Munich

Runners-up in the 2008 Euros and third at the World Cups of 2006 and 2010, Germany may have turned the glorious near-miss into an art form in recent tournaments but you will be hard pushed to find anyone back home complaining about the "bridesmaid syndrome".

After plumbing the depths at Euro 2000 – in which they failed to win a single match and suffered ignominious first-round elimination – root-and-branch reform of the domestic youth development system has, bit by bit, restored the team to their elite status. And supporters are convinced the current line-up, crammed with young lions, is merely at the beginning of an awe-inspiring cycle as Germany try to claim their first international title since Euro 96.

Indeed, if a survey by leading sports magazine *Kicker* is to be believed, Germany will sweep the board. More than two-thirds of respondents expect skipper Philipp Lahm to lift the trophy in Kiev on July 1, with fans equally confident brilliant young creative midfielder Mesut Ozil and striker Miroslav Klose will be crowned player of the tournament and top scorer respectively.

It's almost as if a brutally tough first-phase draw – matched with Holland, Portugal and Denmark – passed the country by.

While such vox pop exercises can easily be bent out of shape by patriotism and insularity, not by any stretch of the imagination were these poll results born solely out of blind faith. The Class of 2012 is very much a force to be reckoned with and comprehensively proved it on the road to the finals, winning 10 games out

of 10 and generally sauntering through with an attractive mixture of guile and swagger.

Reasons for German optimism come in all shapes and sizes. Some point to the surfeit of firepower in Klose, Ozil, Mario Gomez, Thomas Muller and Lukas Podolski; others stress the country's time-honoured tournament know-how, with their ability to prepare meticulously and then cleverly plot their way through a competition. Others think the biggest trump card is their young talent, the best generation to emerge in Germany for many a year – the fresh-faced class of Ozil, Muller, Manuel Neuer, Mats Hummels, Sami Khedira, Jerome Boateng and Holger Badstuber, with other *wunderkinder* such as Mario Gotze, Marco Reus and Toni Kroos bubbling under.

With an average age of just 24.9 years, this is the youngest Germany squad since way back in 1934, and their vitality, total lack of fear and eagerness to please is undoubtedly at the heart of the huge wave of national feel-good factor they benefit from at the moment.

Style revolution

What Germany also have going for them is the astute team-building, wily tactical shape-shifting and clever man-management of coach Joachim Low. In six years as *Bundestrainer*, "Jogi", as he is known, has been responsible for a style revolution that is miles away from the old recipe based on industry, playing in straight lines and winning ugly.

Using one or two touches and brimming with fluidity and invention, Germany can now entertain with the best, and it was no surprise

GROUP B

09.06.12	Portugal (Lviv, Ukr)
13.06.12	Holland (Kharkiv, Ukr)
17.06.12	Denmark (Lviv, Ukr)

when Spain boss Vicente Del Bosque described them as the "best football-playing German team I've ever seen".

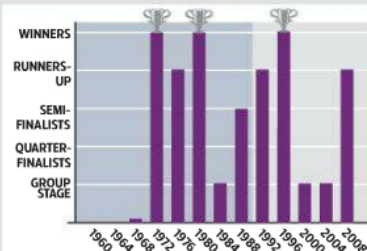
The outlook is not cloudless, however. Even Low would have to admit he has yet to settle on a stable back four, while some of his most influential players are struggling with injury or a shortage of playing time at club level.

Bastian Schweinsteiger has missed a chunk of the season with shoulder and ankle problems, Klose and Per Mertesacker have also been sidelined with injuries, while Khedira is far from an automatic starter at Real Madrid.

There is still much for Low to ponder before the big kick-off. **WS**

EURO RECORD

1960-1988 as West Germany



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP A

03.09.10	Belgium (a)	1-0
07.09.10	Azerbaijan (h)	6-1
08.10.10	Turkey (h)	3-0
12.10.10	Kazakhstan (a)	3-0
26.03.11	Kazakhstan (h)	4-0
03.06.11	Austria (a)	2-1
07.06.11	Azerbaijan (a)	3-1
02.09.11	Austria (h)	6-2
07.10.11	Turkey (a)	3-1
11.10.11	Belgium (h)	3-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	10	10	0	0	34	7	30
Turkey	10	5	2	3	13	11	17
Belgium	10	4	3	3	21	15	15
Austria	10	3	3	4	16	17	12
Azerbaijan	10	2	1	7	10	26	7
Kazakhstan	10	1	1	8	6	24	4

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	France (h)	1-2
26.05.12	Switzerland (a)	
31.05.12	Israel (h)	

BASE CAMP



Germany will arrive in Gdansk on June 4 and stay at the city's Hotel Dwor Oliwski. They will train at the nearby Sports and Recreation Centre, where Lechia Gdansk used to play league matches before they moved to the PGE Arena Gdansk.

Joachim Low

“The squad I have is hungry, driven and very focused on the goal of winning. We know how to live with the pressure”

How do you feel about your group phase? The “group of death” tag seems apt...

On the face of it, we have been drawn in the toughest group of them all. Holland and Portugal both have many world-class individuals and our games with them are going to be real duels; matches, dare I say it, with a do-or-die quality. As for Denmark, they have, over the years, proved themselves to be a competent tournament team. They don't fear big names and have nothing to lose. That makes them dangerous and unpredictable. I'd go as far as to say that every side in Group B has a reasonable chance to go through.

You totally outclassed Holland 3-0 in a friendly in November. Does that give you a psychological edge?

On the night we played exceptionally and obviously took many positives from the game. The Holland we meet in June will be a stronger, more convincing one I'm sure.

Can such a highly competitive group be turned to your advantage?

Of course. It's certainly no bad thing to face a stiff challenge straight away. Games against Portugal and Holland are a truly demanding start. I'm not sure that Germany have ever had such a tough first two fixtures in a tournament. But the other side of the coin is that motivation will not be a problem. Every player knows full well that every game in the first round will have a great deal riding on it. There will be no margin for error. In any case, we are used to battling through the opening phase of a competition. At both Euro 2008 and the last World Cup we only secured qualification in the last of our three matches, winning effective “Finals” against Austria and Ghana. So we know how to live with the pressure of finding a way through a closely matched group.

Does your perfect record in qualification pose any problems? Complacency perhaps?

I've no worries at all on that score. The squad I have is hungry, driven and very much focused on the goal of winning a trophy. No one here is under the illusion that the job ended with qualification, however impressive we were.

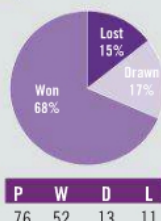


Confident...Low has faith in his young side

COACH'S RECORD



Low's side won an impressive 10 out of 10 in qualifying. However, they were beaten 2-1 at home by France in a friendly in February.



Germany are thought of as one of the favourites and confidence is high in the country that you can do it...

After doing so well in qualification, expectations did go through the roof. But the draw has, I think, dampened the euphoria a little. There's more realism among the public now. Anything can happen in a tournament. A shot on target or not can make all the difference and so can injuries. Like all the coaches, I'll be keeping my fingers crossed the lads are fit after a long, strenuous season. Of course, winning Euro 2012 is a legitimate objective for a team with so much self-confidence, footballing quality and desire to make a mark. Without that belief you will not go far. I think we've comprehensively proved in recent years we are one of the best sides in the world. We're much more consistent than we

were two or three years ago, more solid, more automatic in our combination play.

What are your strengths?

One of the biggest things for me is to see how we've developed into a real team, one which has togetherness running right through it. No player solely looks out for himself. Everyone helps everyone else, and when new guys are introduced they settle in amazingly quickly. Team spirit became very strong during the World Cup in South Africa and this continues to serve us very well.

An outstanding crop of young players has come through...

They are fundamental to what we do. They bring freshness, enthusiasm, great skills, audacity. They are desperate for success and simply love coming together to play high-tempo attacking football. They are so full of energy I sometimes need to put a brake on them.

Could Euro 2012 be a shoot-out between Spain and yourselves?

Spain are outstanding but far from the only candidate for the title. The Dutch have an excellent side. I've always had the greatest respect for the abilities of the Portuguese, France are improving and England should not be discounted.

Interview by Nick Bidwell

Focused...after lean times, Gomez is now scoring regularly for both Bayern Munich and Germany



Mario Gomez

“I feel like after all my problems with the national team I’ve come out the other side”

There is a lot of euphoria in Germany about your chances at Euro 2012. Is it realistic?

When you take into account our excellent performances at the last World Cup, and in qualification for this championship, we have to be confident. Spain still are the absolute point of reference, but I believe we are well on our way to catching them. It says everything about our self-belief that even a second- or third-place finish will leave us very disappointed. If we play as we can, if we set up as we can, we have as good a chance as anyone.

What makes you so optimistic?

The huge creative and goalscoring potential we have in the team, for a start. We move the ball around well, have a good understanding in our build-up, are quick to turn defence into attack and play with a large amount of flair. We’re a very strong unit. We love coming together on national-team duty and get a lot of pleasure and enjoyment out of it. We’re rivals in the Bundesliga, but as soon as the squad assembles the feeling of solidarity and camaraderie takes over in a big way.

How does it feel being in a group with Portugal and Holland?

To win outright you have to get past the best at some point or other. A European Championship naturally means high

standards. We will not have the luxury of easing our way in, we immediately get down to business with Portugal and Holland. We’ll be ready and certainly have no apprehension. That’s the mark of this team. We can’t wait.

Who are your main threat?

The usual names: the Spanish, the Dutch, the Italians, maybe the French.

You are of Spanish descent, so would you relish a Germany-Spain Final?

I have a lot in common with Spain. But the bottom line is I don’t care who we play, just as long as we go the distance.

You currently are in the hottest goalscoring streak of your career for club and country. How do you explain such an explosive upturn?

A lot of it is down to hard work in training, taking care to improve each and every aspect of my game, never being satisfied. At 26 I think I’m at the optimum age for a striker. I’ve the necessary experience and no longer become distracted by missed chances. I’m more relaxed. I don’t dwell on things. I stay calm and focus on the next opportunity. It’s a question of maturity.

How intense is your competition with Miroslav Klose for the one spot at the point of the attack?

Competition is part of the game. You

have to accept it, learn to thrive on it. Miro is a phenomenal goalscorer. He’s done wonders for the national team over a very long period. The competition between us is healthy and respectful, but it’s still a battle to impress. May the best man win. All I can do is stay fit and keep scoring. Then it’s up to the coach.

What got you through the hard times when you weren’t producing the goods for Germany?

It’s never easy to be jeered and whistled, to have people constantly wondering why you can’t translate your goals from club to national team. I just had to persevere. I thought I belonged at this level and was determined to prove it. I wanted to counter all those who laughed at me for my bad miss against Austria at Euro 2008. There was my motivation. Of course, I also owe a lot to Joachim Low. When many were predicting I would never make it as an international striker, he absolutely stood by me and it kept me going. When he made me captain for the first time against Ukraine last year it was like fulfilling every kid’s dream. What made it even better was that it was also my 50th cap. It was a huge satisfaction as well as confirmation of my significance to the squad. After all my problems I felt I had come out the other side.

Interview by Nick Bidwell

THE VIEW FROM GERMANY



“It’s arguably the most difficult group a German team has ever faced. We will be tested to the limit. That said, I do have a good feeling about our chances. This is our strongest squad in years and we’ve some really talented and enthusiastic youngsters. They remind me a little of the European Championship-winning squad of 1980, when Schuster, Karl-Heinz Forster and Matthaus were breaking through. We had Mesut Ozil in Bremen and he always was an exceptional midfielder – great touch on the ball, a fantastic dribbler. He can make the difference and I see him as a future Ballon d’Or winner”

Klaus Allofs, Werder Bremen general manager and former Germany striker



“While Spain remain the team to beat, we are, I’m convinced, making up ground rapidly. We all know Jogi Low is an intelligent coach, but what stands out for me is the strength of his conviction, his guts. Many coaches are wary of giving young players a chance, they don’t think long term. Low is the opposite. He values the youngsters’ ability and hunger and has been rewarded with an outstanding team”

Hansi Muller, former Germany midfielder

“Any team with players of the calibre of Bastian Schweinsteiger, Thomas Muller and the creative genius that is Mesut Ozil has to be considered a totally worthy contender. I’d rather not keep hearing how we haven’t won anything since 1996. I think Jogi Low’s on the verge of something big. His vision of attractive, high-tempo and skilful football is a breath of fresh air”

Olaf Thon, ex-Schalke, Bayern Munich and Germany midfielder

GOALKEEPERS



Manuel NEUER

Age 26 (27.03.86)
Bayern Munich
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Possesses good reflexes and top-notch distribution. Signed from Schalke last summer, he went to the same Gelsenkirchen school as national-team colleagues Özil and Howedes.



Tim WIESE

Age 30 (17.12.81)
Werder Bremen
QR: 0 goals
Has said he will leave Bremen when his contract expires this summer after seven years, during which time he has played in the Champions League five times and won the German Cup.



Ron-Robert ZIELER

Age 23 (12.02.89)
Hanover
QR: 0 goals
Unflappable and utterly consistent, he has played for Manchester United's youth and reserve teams.

COACH

Joachim LOW

Age 52 (03.02.60)
Germany coach since July 2006

Shrewd tactician and motivator who has done sterling work for the German federation over the past eight years, first as Jürgen Klinsmann's assistant, then in the role of attack-conscious *Bundestrainer*. Known as "Jogi", he was a midfielder with Stuttgart, Freiburg and Eintracht Frankfurt before turning to coaching – an odyssey which has included spells in charge of Stuttgart, Tirol Innsbruck, Austria Vienna, Fenerbahçe and Adanaspor.



DEFENDERS



Holger BADSTUBER

Age 23 (13.03.89)
Bayern Munich
QR: 9 games/1 goal
Unassuming central defender who can appear rather ungainly. Can also play left-back. Will miss the Champions League Final through suspension. His pride and joy is his baseball cap collection.



Jerome BOATENG

Age 23 (03.09.88)
Bayern Munich
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Berlin-born son of a German mother and Ghanaian father who prefers to play in central defence but also has to make do with the right-back slot. The half-brother of Milan's Kevin-Prince Boateng.



Benedikt HOWEDES

Age 24 (29.02.88)
Schalke
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Right-back or central defender who was a European champion with Germany's under-21s in 2009. Like ex-Germany defensive stalwart Christoph Metzelder, he started out at Ruhr side Haltern.



Mats HUMMELS

Age 23 (16.12.88)
Borussia Dortmund
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Elegant central defender who has come on by leaps and bounds in the past couple of years. Deemed surplus to requirements in 2008 by Bayern, where his father used to be a youth-team coach.



Philipp LAHM

Age 28 (11.11.83)
Bayern Munich
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Comfortable in either full-back position – though he prefers the left-side – the captain is assertive and driven, and with his dribbling skills is a fine attacking operative. Former ballboy at Bayern.

MIDFIELDERS



Mario GOTZE

Age 19 (03.06.92)
Borussia Dortmund
QR: 4 games/1 goal
Signed a new deal in March, committing him to Dortmund until 2016. The Bavarian-born playmaker has been on their books since he was eight. His father is a university professor in Dortmund.



Sami KHEDIRA

Age 25 (04.04.87)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Dynamic and skilful defensive midfielder who proved a sensation when taking over from the injured Michael Ballack at the 2010 World Cup. His partner is top model Lena Gercke.



Toni KROOS

Age 22 (04.01.90)
Bayern Munich
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Effective as a deep-lying controller or prompting further forward. More confident and physically stronger since returning to Bayern in 2010 after a loan spell at Leverkusen. His brother Felix plays for Bremen.



Mesut OZIL

Age 23 (15.10.88)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 9 games/5 goals
Extravagant playmaker who is the Ruhr-born son of Turkish immigrants. Nicknamed "Nemo" by Real team-mates for his resemblance to the fish with the big eyes in the Disney cartoon.



Marco REUS

Age 22 (31.05.89)
Borussia Mönchengladbach
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Second striker or winger who will join hometown club Dortmund next season. Dubbed "Woody" (Woodpecker) because of the way he nods his head while running.

FORWARDS



CACAU

Age 31 (27.03.81)
Stuttgart
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Naturalised Brazilian who quickly finds his feet when coming on as a sub. A committed Christian, his acquisition of a German passport led to team-mates giving him the German Christian name "Helmut".



Mario GOMEZ

Age 26 (10.07.85)
Bayern Munich
QR: 6 games/6 goals
Powerful target man currently in the goalscoring form of his life. Extended his contract with Bayern to 2016. Very much a confidence player. The son of a Spanish father and German mother.



Miroslav KLOSE

Age 33 (09.06.78)
Lazio (Ita)
QR: 6 games/9 goals
Scored 13 goals in Serie A this season before injuring his left thigh in March. Fast closing in on Gerd Müller's national-team record of 68 goals. Born in Poland, his father played for French club Auxerre.



Thomas MULLER

Age 22 (13.09.89)
Bayern Munich
QR: 10 games/3 goals
Home-grown Bayern academy product who in the 2009-10 season went from almost complete anonymity to club superstar and World Cup leading marksman.



Lukas PODOLSKI

Age 26 (04.06.85)
Cologne
QR: 9 games/3 goals
Left-sided midfielder or striker famed for his shooting power and bullish competitiveness. Born in Poland, he is expected to join Arsenal in the summer.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Low's young guns continue to develop and grow in confidence

Although Low did experiment with a 3-4-1-2 system in a friendly against Ukraine last autumn, he is most likely to stick with his tried-and-tested 4-2-3-1 this summer, a flexible formation which can mutate into a 4-3-3 when wide midfielders Muller and Podolski push on, or a 4-2-4 with playmaker Ozil sniffing around the nominal lone striker.

Low's philosophy is based on a number of golden rules: a relentlessly effective



Per MERTESACKER

Age 27 (29.09.84)
Arsenal (Eng)
QR: 7 games/0 goals

Although the centre-back has struggled to settle this season at Arsenal, Low remains a big admirer of the stopper's composure. His partner is German international handball star Ulrike Stange.



Marcel SCHMELZER

Age 24 (22.01.88)
Borussia Dortmund
QR: 1 game/0 goals

A bundle of energy at left-back and conspicuous by his headband, total commitment and relentless attacking sorties. Was once on the books of top east German club Magdeburg.



Simon ROLFES

Age 30 (21.01.82)
Bayer Leverkusen
QR: 0 games

As well as a dutiful and intelligent plugger of gaps in and around the back-line, the Leverkusen skipper is not afraid to slip into a forward gear when the need arises. Missed the 2010 World Cup with a knee injury.



Andre SCHURRLE

Age 21 (06.11.90)
Bayer Leverkusen
QR: 5 games/3 goals

Since moving from Mainz to Leverkusen last summer, the left-sided midfielder-cum-winger has not exactly covered himself in glory. His favourite goal celebration is a spot of air guitar.



Bastian SCHWEINSTEIGER

Age 27 (01.08.84)
Bayern Munich
QR: 5 games/1 goal

The brains of the side, a world-class central midfielder not only capable of directing the traffic but also a disciplined worker. Scored the winning penalty in the Champions League semi-final shoot-out.

collective pressing game, defending without resorting to fouls, slick circulation of the ball and brutal changes of attacking tempo. Snappy one- and two-touch combination play is the key, and the *Bundestrainer* is especially proud of the fact that in the past half-dozen years the average time German players are in possession of the ball has fallen from 2.8 to 1.1 seconds.

The *Nationalmannschaft* principally took the counter-attacking route at the 2010 World Cup, but they have since become more confident in taking the initiative. While Schweinsteiger expertly runs the show in the middle of the park, there is no such authoritative figure at the back.

Set-pieces need some work too. Gotze and Reus could make their mark if given a chance.

Nick Bidwell



Fluid...Muller

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN

Age 20 (30.04.92)
Borussia Monchengladbach
Caps 0
Only 18 months into his first-team career.

DEFENDERS

Dennis AOGO

Age 25 (14.01.87)
Hamburg
Caps 10 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Left-back who was a member of the 2010 World Cup squad.

Christian TRASCH

Age 24 (01.09.87)
Wolfsburg
Caps 10 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
The Wolfsburg captain can play full-back, central defender or as a midfield holder.

MIDFIELDERS

Lars BENDER

Age 23 (27.04.89)
Bayer Leverkusen
Caps 4 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Industrious and tactically-aware twin brother of Dortmund's Sven.

Sven BENDER

Age 23 (27.04.89)
Borussia Dortmund
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Similar in playing style to his sibling. Compromised by a string of injuries this season.

Kevin GROSSKREUTZ

Age 23 (19.07.88)
Borussia Dortmund
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Left-sided attacking midfielder renowned for his non-stop running and over-the-top temperament.

Ilkay GUNDOGAN

Age 21 (29.10.90)
Borussia Dortmund
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Took time settling in at Dortmund following a move from Nuremberg last summer but has enjoyed an impressive spring campaign.

Patrick HERRMANN

Age 21 (12.02.91)
Borussia Monchengladbach
Caps 0
Has pace to burn and the ability to make and take chances.

FORWARD

Mike HANKE

Age 28 (05.11.83)
Borussia Monchengladbach
Caps 12 (1 goal)
QR: 0 games
Included in the 2006 World Cup squad, he went into decline for a few years before returning to form this term at Gladbach.



Young talent...Papadopoulos dominates Belgium in February's friendly

GREECE Anything is possible

The Greeks do not fear their group opponents



MANOS STARAMOPOULOS
in Athens

After losing all three matches at Euro 2008 in Austria-Switzerland, Greece made a rapid exit from the tournament, with German coach Otto Rehhagel, the hero of 2004, unable to repeat the heroics that had seen Greece stun Europe four years previously.

Rehhagel has now been replaced by Portuguese coach Fernando Santos and there are realistic hopes that Greece can reach the second phase – from where anything is possible. While Greece are no superteam, they know how to defend properly and will not be scared by any of their first three opponents.

Under Santos, the changes have been slow but purposeful. It's been evolution not revolution as the elder generation has slowly been eased out and new blood gradually given an opportunity. Santos has also given the players greater freedom of movement on the pitch, with positive results.

Greece are in a curious group, where they could finish as the best side or the worst.

The key fixture will be the opening match against hosts Poland, which will revive memories of Euro 2004, when Greece stunned hosts Portugal in the tournament's opening match. The Czech Republic are nowhere near the side of Pavel Nedved and Jan Koller of 2004, although Russia do have class players in Andrei Arshavin, Roman Pavlyuchenko and Pavel Pogrebnyak. Fortunately for Greece they play Russia in their final game, when hopefully they will have enough points already in the bag.

Certainly they can take heart from a successful qualifying campaign. They began with an unexpected draw in Piraeus against

Georgia, but in the next game they managed a significant result, taking a point from group favourites Croatia in Zagreb.

Performances then improved as the changes introduced by Santos paid off. Five consecutive victories followed and Greece took charge of the group. A dip followed as they underestimated their next opponents, Latvia, and drew in Riga. But the Greek federation president publicly backed the coach and his loyalty was rewarded in the penultimate game, in Piraeus, where Croatia were beaten and Greece returned to the top of the standings. In the last game, in Tbilisi, a smart and disciplined performance earned a 2-1 victory and Greece were through to the finals.

Contrast to Rehhagel

Santos may not have the big-name reputation of Rehhagel but he is intimate with the realities of Greek domestic football, having coached AEK Athens, Panathinaikos and PAOK. He has lived in Greece for a number years – in contrast to Rehhagel, who continued to live in Essen, Germany, arriving two days before each game – and he watches domestic games on a weekly basis, and not just in the Super League.

The Portuguese technician has not been afraid to drop big-name players if they are not in peak condition and he has taken a keen interest in all levels of the national team, from youth through to the senior side, ensuring there is a common style of play.

He has also placed a strong emphasis on promoting young talent, with Sotiris Ninis, Giannis Fetfatzidis and Kyriakos Papadopoulos

GROUP A

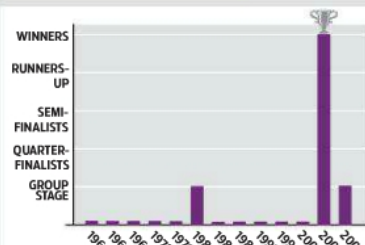
08.06.12	Poland (Warsaw, Pol)
12.06.12	Czech Republic (Wroclaw, Pol)
16.06.12	Russia (Warsaw, Pol)

all coming through in the past two years.

The mood in the squad is positive and the players no longer have split loyalties between club and country. And while the economic crisis has affected many of the players, Santos knows that a good performance in Poland could give the whole country a boost.

The only real headache for the coach is the goalkeeping situation. Michalis Sifakis of Aris only recently returned from serious injury but he is hoping to play his way into the squad. Meanwhile, Dionysis Chiotis had an impressive presence between the posts for APOEL Nicosia in their Champions League campaign, Orestis Karnezis of Panathinaikos is much improved this season while his teenage understudy Stefanos Kapino has enjoyed a rapid rise. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP F

03.09.10	Georgia (h)	1-1
07.09.10	Croatia (a)	0-0
08.10.10	Latvia (h)	1-0
12.06.10	Israel (h)	2-1
26.03.11	Malta (a)	1-0
04.06.11	Malta (h)	3-1
02.09.11	Israel (a)	1-0
06.09.11	Latvia (a)	1-1
07.10.11	Croatia (h)	2-0
11.10.11	Georgia (a)	2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	10	7	3	0	14	5	24
Croatia	10	7	1	2	18	7	22
Israel	10	5	1	4	13	11	16
Latvia	10	3	2	5	9	12	11
Georgia	10	2	4	4	7	9	10
Malta	10	0	1	9	4	21	1

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Belgium (h)	1-1
26.05.12	Slovenia (in Austria)	
31.05.12	Armenia (in Austria)	

BASE CAMP



Greece will leave for Poland on June 3. They are staying at the Hotel Warszawianka Serock, a few miles outside Warsaw, and will train at the Miejski Stadion in nearby Legionowo.

Fernando Santos

“We want to bring some joy to a people who have not had much joy in recent times”

People are saying that success at the Euros would be a great boost for Greece after the economic crisis? Is a repeat of 2004 really possible?

What I want the Greek people to know is that we will bleed to succeed. We will give 100 per cent for Greece. The fans should have faith in us. In all our matches we always strive hard and we always want to honour Greece and to bring some joy to a people who have not had much joy in recent times.

What is your assessment of the group that Greece finds itself in, along with Russia, Czech Republic and Poland?

The group that we have been drawn in is passable as all of the teams have a 25 per cent chance of advancing. I don't believe in lucky or unlucky draws. Everything will be decided on the pitch. What I wish for above all is that all my players are in good physical condition after the end of the domestic championship. I have total trust in them and I know they will be ready for the group stage.

What will be your criteria when you select your final squad?

When we go to Austria for training in May I will take with me players who have a good tactical knowledge and technique; this must be the basic criteria. Then we will work on fitness and team spirit. I want players who can build a strong team, both on and off the pitch. If you can create a compact group, that is a hugely important step.

Does that mean you will favour more experienced players at the expense of younger ones?

It's important that a player has experience so that he does not get overwhelmed by anxiety in

a tournament situation. Therefore we need strong personalities, whether they are young or old. I am also interested in players who can play in a number of positions.

How would you describe your team's style of play?

We stick 100 per cent to the basic principles – which are to have passion, organisation, a clear mind and a determination to win at all times.

Have you made a deliberate attempt to differentiate your team from that of your predecessor?

We have our own identity and will not change for anyone. I will not follow the

COACH'S RECORD



Fernando Santos has only lost one game since taking charge of the national side – a 3-1 friendly defeat by Romania in Austria.



P	W	D	L
19	10	8	1

tactics of Rehagel. I want them to say that Santos' national team is a compact group with a clear identity in the game. We want to dominate the game.

Interview by Lou Economopoulos

Identity...Santos wants to make his own mark on the national side





Calm down...skipper Karagounis appeals to the fans after crowd trouble halted the Euro qualifier against Croatia in Athens last October

Giorgos Karagounis

“It’s extra motivation for us to give joy to our compatriots and help them forget everyday problems for a short time at least”

How is the mood in the Greek camp?

Very good, very positive. We will go to the Euros with ambitions fuelled both by the fact that we qualified for the finals in first place and were unbeaten, and also by the fact that squad spirit is very good. We can’t wait for the tournament to start.

How has the transition between coaches Otto Rehhagel and Fernando Santos affected the squad?

At first the transition was a bit difficult because there were some changes, not only in the game plan but also in the daily schedule and rules which were imposed by the new coach. But these changes were absorbed quickly and any problems were overcome.

What are the team’s strengths?

The spirit which distinguishes us, as well as the faith in each other and in ourselves is the belief that we can achieve something good. I doubt if you would find a team with more passion for achievement when representing their country. We will give it our all in order to qualify for the knockout rounds.

You played in the Euro 2004-winning team. How does this one compare?

Today’s team, with the exception of one or two more experienced and older players, is more youthful. In the style of play there are a number of similarities,

but there is also the diversity in our attacking game which probably wasn’t there in 2004.

Do you believe Greece can repeat the miracle of 2004?

Such things do not happen often. Even countries with great potential have failed to win a second Euro in such a short time. It is even harder when you consider that our infrastructure, as well as the domestic league, is not the best. But we have faith and passion in the team and this overrides any disadvantages. In a tournament like the Euros it’s about getting out of the group. Let’s do that first then see. If we manage to qualify for the last eight, we’ll have the same chance as anyone else. Certainly there are teams that stand out, such as Germany, Spain, Italy or Holland. But we also have ambitions. Don’t forget, we are in the finals for the third time in a row and that says a lot.

What of your group rivals?

Poland will be playing at home and thus will have their supporters behind them. Russia has quality and talent. The Czech Republic is never absent from major tournaments. All are good teams. We, if you look at the past decade, are more stable in our course and our successes. If we’re in the right form at the right time we can achieve a lot.

As the most-capped player in the team, what has stood out during your international career?

Obviously winning the Euro 2004 Final against Portugal. On the same level of importance and joy it has to be the second play-off match against Ukraine to qualify for the 2010 World Cup. That match was a great opportunity, perhaps the last for many of the team, to play in a World Cup finals. The odds were against us, we were down to nine men but achieved a great victory, one of the most significant in the history of our national team.

How have Greece’s economic problems, and those of clubs like Panathinaikos, affected you?

Clearly this is not the best thing for some players, who have an uncertain future. There are many problems in football and in the country, and we all live them. But when it is time to fight for the national team, especially in a big tournament, there is no room for these thoughts. We must commit ourselves to the team and its goals. Even so, it will be an extra motivation for us to give joy to our compatriots during the tournament, to help them forget the problems of everyday life for a short time at least.

Interview by Lou Economopoulos

THE VIEW FROM GREECE



“There are no easy and difficult draws; in the finals of the European Championship there are only difficult matches. What matters is that Greece is once again present in the final stage”

Sofoklis Pilavios, president of the Greek football federation



“Greek footballers have the experience and ability to cope with these difficult match obligations. It is good that we will play in Poland because that’s where the transportation will be much easier. Another positive aspect for us is that the training centre is in Warsaw, where we play two of our group matches”

Takis Fyssas, technical director of the Greek football federation

“Greece’s group provides the opportunity for us to move on to the quarter-finals. However the draw does not make us the favourites. It needs pain, struggle, sweat and blood. Otherwise a really great draw will remain meaningless. Just as easily as we believe we will finish first, we may end up last in the group. As always in such tournaments, the first match is vitally important. We play co-hosts Poland and I’m not one to believe we should paint everything black simply because the Poles will start in front of their fanatical fans. Instead, I think the stress will weigh heavily on them, especially when there is no European superpower involved. We must not underestimate anyone. With faith and hard work – the parameters that characterise us – we deserve to be optimistic”

Pavlos Papadimitriou, TV and radio sports journalist

GOALKEEPERS

Dionisis CHIOTIS

Age 34 (04.06.77)
APOEL (Cyp)
QR: 0 games
Former AEK keeper who was one of the stars of APOEL's run to the knockout stage of the Champions League this season. Capped once, back in 2002.


Orestis KARNEZIS

Age 26 (11.07.85)
Panathinaikos
QR: 0 games
After three seasons as back-up to Kotsolis at club level, he became Panathinaikos' first choice this term and was rewarded with a first cap, against Belgium in February.


Michalis SIFAKIS

Age 27 (09.09.84)
Aris
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Voted the best goalkeeper in the Greek Super League by sports writers last year. Struggling to recovery from injury in time to play at Euro 2012.

COACH
FERNANDO SANTOS (Por)

Age 57 (10.10.54)
Greece coach since July 2010
Took over from Euro 2004-winning coach Otto Rehhagel and has kept the team in the top 15 nations of the FIFA rankings. Had a run of 16 unbeaten matches before a 3-1 friendly loss to Romania spoiled his record. Led Porto to the Portuguese league title in 1999 and AEK Athens to the Greek Cup in 2002, and later had spells in charge of Sporting Lisbon and Benfica, among others. Signed a two-year contract extension in April.


DEFENDERS

Jose HOLEBAS

Age 27 (27.06.84)
Olympiakos
QR: 0 games
Born in Germany, he joined Olympiakos from Munich 1860 in 2010. Received a Greek passport – his father is Greek, his mother Uruguayan – in November. Takes a good corner kick.


Kostas MANOLAS

Age 20 (14.06.91)
AEK Athens
QR: 0 games
Highly rated centre-back who has yet to make his international debut but who was included in a 30-man provisional squad ahead of the 2010 World Cup.


Avraam PAPADOPOULOS

Age 27 (03.05.84)
Olympiakos
QR: 7 games/0 goals  
A regular starter under Santos, he is a steady performer but often comes free-kicks with his aggressive style of play.


Kyriakos PAPADOPOULOS

Age 20 (23.02.92)
Schalke (Ger)
QR: 4 games/2 goals  
At 15 he was the youngest player ever to play in the Greek Super League when at Olympiakos. Likes to attack. Not related to Avraam.


Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS

Age 23 (09.06.88)
Werder Bremen (Ger)
QR: 8 games/0 goals   
Bremen activated their option to sign him from Genoa in April after a season-long loan from the Italian club. At 19 he was the youngest-ever captain in AEK Athens' history.

MIDFIELDERS

Giannis FETFAZIDIS

Age 21 (21.12.90)
Olympiakos
QR: 6 games/2 goals 
An excellent dribbler, he has not had too much playing time with his club, but national coach Santos counts on him to make an impact from the bench.


Giorgos FOTAKIS

Age 30 (29.10.81)
PAOK
QR: 2 games/1 goal
An attacking midfielder, he joined PAOK in 2009 – three years after he was on the books of Scottish club Kilmarnock.


Giorgos KARAGOUNIS

Age 35 (06.03.77)
Panathinaikos
QR: 10 games/1 goal 
Five behind Greece's most-capped player of all time, Theodoros Zagorakis. Dangerous from free-kicks and a master at keeping possession. A mainstay of the Euro 2004-winning side.


Kostas KATSOURANIS

Age 32 (21.06.79)
Panathinaikos
QR: 9 games/0 goals  
Another veteran from Euro 2004, he still has plenty of speed. Returned to Greece in 2009, joining Panathinaikos after being voted Benfica's player of the year.


Grigoris MAKOS

Age 25 (18.01.87)
AEK Athens
QR: 3 games/0 goals
A defensive midfielder and former captain of the under-21 side. Had an outstanding early career at Panionios, where he captained the team at 19 and made 100 Super League appearances by 21.

FORWARDS

Fanis GEKAS

Age 31 (23.05.80)
Samsunspor (Tur)
QR: 4 games/1 goal
Europe's top scorer in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers with 10 goals, he came out of international retirement when Santos took over. Signed a six-month contract with Samsunspor in January.


Nikos LIBEROPOULOS

Age 36 (04.08.75)
AEK Athens
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Reaching the end of his career, he has been a regular substitute for Santos and his experience may be needed. He links well with midfield and has a fierce long-range shot. Also dangerous in the air.


Kostas MITROGLOU

Age 24 (12.03.88)
Olympiakos
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Has made a name for himself this season on loan at Atromitos from the Greek champions.


Dimitris SALPIGIDIS

Age 30 (10.08.81)
PAOK
QR: 10 games/1 goal 
Short and quick, he scored the winning goal in the 2010 World Cup play-offs against the Ukraine and also claimed his country's first-ever goal at the finals, against Nigeria.


Giorgos SAMARAS

Age 27 (21.02.85)
Celtic (Sco)
QR: 8 games/1 goal  
Son of former international Ioannis Samaras, he scored key goals in 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012 qualifiers. Has also played club football in Holland and England.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Euro 2004 winners will be more attacking but will not change their "identity"

Previously known as a coach who preferred the 4-4-2 system, Santos now seems more comfortable with a 4-3-3 formation.

Santos has a host of goalies to choose from, although his latest favourite is Orestis Karnezis, while his steady selections on defence are Vasilis Torosidis and Jose Holebas at the wings, and Sokratis Papastathopoulos and Avraam Papadopoulos in the centre.

The Portuguese likes his teams to attack, so watch out for Torosidis and Holebas



Nikos SPYROPOULOS

Age 28 (10.10.83)
Panathinaikos
QR: 4 games/1 goal
Left-footed, with pace and strength, he has been with Panathinaikos since 2008 and made his 100th appearance for them this season.



Vasilis TOROSIDIS

Age 26 (10.06.85)
Olympiakos
QR: 7 games/2 goals
Known for his driving runs, he can play anywhere in defence, as a defensive midfielder or a right-winger. Captained Olympiakos to a fifth league title in six years this season. Can shoot from distance.



Loukas VYNTRA

Age 31 (05.02.81)
Panathinaikos
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Experienced defender whose versatility – he can play across the back line – is likely to see him included in the final squad. Member of the Euro 2008 and 2010 World Cup squads.

making continual runs down the flanks. Although his defence looks settled, youngster Maniatis could figure in his plans.

Santos has been more flexible in midfield, trying out a number of younger players such as Giorgos Fotakis and Giannis Fetfatzidis. However, veterans Kostas Katsouranis and Giorgos Karagounis will most likely get the call for the Euros, along with Sotiris Ninis – if he recovers from injury.

Experience is likely to be favoured up front as well, with Giorgos Samaras and Dimitris Salpigdis on the wings and Gekas in the centre. However, Kostas Mitroglou, second top scorer in the Greek league, may also some playing time, probably at the expense of veteran Angelos Charisteas.

Santos has generated a more attacking team than his predecessor Rehhagel, who was known for being defensive minded.

Lou Economopoulos



Flank...Holebas



Giannis MANIATIS

Age 25 (12.10.86)
Olympiakos
QR: 3 games/0 goals
A defensive midfielder for his club, Santos prefers to use him at right-back. A former under-21 international, he has good stamina, speed, agility and works hard.



Sotiris NINIS

Age 22 (03.04.90)
Panathinaikos
QR: 0 games
Became the youngest-ever scorer for the national side at 18 and played in the 2010 World Cup. Born in Albania of parents with Greek descent, he has struggled this season with injury.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

Kostas CHALKIAS

Age 37 (30.05.74)
PAOK
Caps 29/0 goals
QR: 0 games
Veteran who took over from Antonis Nikopolidis after Euro 2008. Reserve in 2004.

DEFENDERS

Stelio MALEZAS

Age 27 (11.03.85)
PAOK
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Former midfielder. In the 2010 World Cup squad but did not play.

Giorgos TZAVELAS

Age 24 (26.11.87)
Monaco (Fra)
Caps 5 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
After two seasons with Eintracht Frankfurt, he joined Monaco in January.

Giannis ZARADOUKAS

Age 26 (12.12.85)
Olympiakos
Caps 4 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Joined Giannina on loan for the remainder of the season in December.

MIDFIELDERS

Kostas FORTOUNIS

Age 19 (16.10.92)
Kaiserslautern (Ger)
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Promoted from the under-21s and made his senior debut against Belgium in February.

Pantelis KAFES

Age 33 (24.06.79)
AEK Athens
Caps 40 (3 goals)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Playmaker for AEK for the last six seasons, he often comes in as a sub for the national side.

Panagiotis KONE

Age 24 (26.07.87)
Brescia (Ita)
Caps 9 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Has spent this season on loan at Bologna.

Alexandros TSIOLIS

Age 27 (13.02.85)
Monaco (Fra)
Caps 31 (1 goal)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Defensive midfielder who played every minute of Greece's three World Cup games in 2010.

FORWARDS

Lazaros CHRISTODOULPOULOS

Age 25 (19.12.86)
Panathinaikos
Caps 7 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Returned to action in January after a six-month lay-off.

Angelos HARISTEAS

Age 32 (09.02.80)
Panetolikos
Caps 88 (25 goals)
QR: 1 game/1 goal
Final goalscoring hero in 2004 who has still been used by Santos as an occasional substitute.

Gripping...Gregory Van der Wiel
tussles with Germany's Mesut Ozil in
the 3-0 friendly defeat in Hamburg



HOLLAND Bert's big question

Did Van Marwijk's side peak at 2010 World Cup?



KLAAS-JAN DROPERT
in Amsterdam

On top of the mountain or over the hill? That is the question regarding Holland's state of affairs. And both points of view seem valid.

After the World Cup Final defeat, Bert Van Marwijk's team were quick to pick up the pieces in the qualifiers. Apart from the results that speak for themselves (4-1 v Sweden, 4-0 v Hungary and 11-0 v San Marino), the team produced some dazzling performances in making sure that reaching Euro 2012 was never a problem. They even conquered top spot in the FIFA rankings last August. And there is also plenty to cheer about that key players such as Mark Van Bommel with Milan, Robin Van Persie, in arguably his best-ever season at Arsenal, and Arjen Robben of Bayern Munich are delivering world-class performances at the highest level on a weekly basis.

However, there is also a downside that has occurred in recent months. While the 3-1 defeat by Sweden which prevented a 100 per cent qualifying record was seen as a minor incident, the 3-0 defeat in a friendly against Germany was a serious wake-up call. Although several key players such as Van Persie and Robben were absent that night, it unquestionably showed Van Marwijk's biggest problem: the lack of depth of his squad. While Germany were fielding one talent after another, Holland reserves Edson Braafheid and Ryan Babel clearly failed to pass the exam.

So it isn't a surprise that Van Marwijk will rely on the World Cup Final starting line-up. But he isn't helped by the fact that some players are no longer playing regularly at club

level, with Joris Mathijsen at Malaga, Dirk Kuyt for Liverpool and Internazionale's Wesley Sneijder often not first choices.

Sneijder's case, in particular, is a bizarre story. Holland's playmaker has had to shrug off several injuries lately, but when fit he was either sitting on the bench or exiled to the left wing. It was only two years ago that many felt he was, along with Xavi and Andres Iniesta, the world's best midfielder.

However, with a pre-tournament training camp coming up, and the atmosphere in the Dutch camp always good under Van Marwijk, Sneijder and the others will probably get in the right form and mood.

Problems appearing

But what will happen if not all the familiar faces are available? Up front and in central midfield, Van Marwijk has nothing to worry about, but it is in defence and on the flanks where problems might appear. Can the experienced but slowing Heitinga and Mathijsen manage one more tournament? And is young Chelsea loanee Jeffrey Bruma, often left out at Hamburg, a reliable understudy now that Twente's Brazil-born Douglas is not eligible until after Euro 2012? And what about the weak spot at left-back? Who should replace the mediocre Erik Pieters? The latest candidates seem to be two midfielders, Stijn Schaars and Urby Emanuelson.

And what if the injury-prone Robben fails? Can Barcelona's Ibrahim Afellay make it in time after missing most of the season with a severe knee injury? And if he won't make it, then who

GROUP B

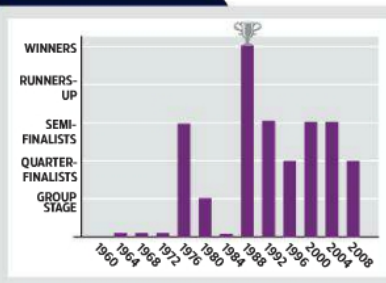
09.06.12	Denmark (Kharkiv, Ukr)
13.06.12	Germany (Kharkiv, Ukr)
17.06.12	Portugal (Kharkiv, Ukr)

does? With Babel and Eljero Elia, who is mostly watching his new club Juventus from the stands, written off, who should Van Marwijk go for? Inexperienced wingers such as Ola John of Twente, AZ's Roy Beerens and Luciano Narsingh of Heerenveen, who perform in the Eredivisie, a minor European League?

As always, the imperturbable 60-year-old coach will make his own plans and will not be distracted by pundits or the public. By May he will see who is available and how he can make the most of them this summer.

By then it will also be clear whether Robben's 62nd-minute chance in the World Cup Final when standing eye-to-eye with Iker Casillas, was this generation's best shot at international silverware. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP E

03.09.10	San Marino (a)	5-0
07.09.10	Finland (h)	2-1
08.10.10	Moldova (a)	1-0
12.10.10	Sweden (h)	4-1
25.03.11	Hungary (a)	4-0
29.03.11	Hungary (h)	5-3
02.09.11	San Marino (h)	11-0
06.09.11	Finland (a)	2-0
07.10.11	Moldova (h)	1-0
11.10.11	Sweden (a)	2-3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	10	9	0	1	37	8	27
Sweden	10	8	0	2	31	11	24
Hungary	10	6	1	3	22	14	19
Finland	10	3	1	6	16	16	10
Moldova	10	3	0	7	12	16	9
San Marino	10	0	0	10	0	53	0

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	England (a)	3-2
26.05.12	Bulgaria (h)	
30.05.12	Slovakia (h)	
02.06.12	Northern Ireland (h)	

BASE CAMP



Holland will leave for Poland on June 4 and they will stay at the Sheraton Krakow Hotel. They will train at the Reymana Stadion, home of Wisla Krakow, and fly in and out of Ukraine for games.

Bert Van Marwijk

“You hear coaches saying that their team can play to four or five different systems but I don’t think that’s realistic”

What do you think of your first-round group?

There is a lot of respect between all of us because I think we can all agree that it is the toughest group. That does, however, have its advantages because it means my players and I know we have to be fully focused.

Who are your favourites to win the tournament?

I am not concerned about who may or may not be the favourites to win the last game in the finals. All my concentration is on our first game.

Other people will consider Holland one of the favourites. Can your players cope with that weight of expectation?

You need to be able to handle pressure because it’s part of sport at the highest level. But you also need to be realistic especially at the European

Championship because just about all the teams are top level. I can say Germany, Spain, England, Italy, Portugal, France. Those are top countries and you don’t just go out and beat them. You have to ensure that everything is absolutely right to give yourself a chance.

But you were runners-up at the last World Cup, so aren’t great expectations inevitable?

We’ve brought these kind of expectations on ourselves with our results, but our previous results have to be seen for only what they were at the time. It’s no guarantee we are going to be able to become champions.

But aren’t you better and stronger for two more years together?

It’s true that as you grow older so you progress in whatever you do. You can’t change your character but you become

COACH’S RECORD



Van Marwijk has won one of his last four games – away to England in February – drawing with Switzerland and losing to Sweden and Germany.



P	W	D	L
45	31	10	4

more mature and work things out better.

Like varying your game plan...

My opinion about football has not changed. A good team plays within a certain structure. You hear coaches say their team can play four or five different systems but I don’t think that’s realistic. What you do is vary the details. That way we can make life difficult for opponents.

Interview by Keir Radnedge



Heated... Van Marwijk has words with referee Howard Webb in the World Cup Final



Skill...Van Persie beats Moldova defenders Alexandru Suvorov (left) and Petru Racu

Robin Van Persie

“The team that won in 1988 was just amazing. It’s the one I’ve always looked up to”

What’s the mood in the Dutch camp ahead of the Euros?

We are all very focused and aiming to win the competition, and in order to do that we are all together. There is lots of laughter and fun, but there is also concentration when needed. We are all like a big family and overall there is a good atmosphere.

You’ve been drawn in the toughest group, with old rivals Germany, Portugal and Denmark. How does that feel?

I don’t think you can find an easy team to play against in the European Championship. All of them have qualified, so that means they are good. Each and every one has strengths and weaknesses – including Germany, Portugal and Denmark. Anybody is beatable. I just hope it won’t be us!

How do Holland play compared with Arsenal? Do you have to adapt your style of play with Holland?

Playing with your national team always differs from representing your club. At Arsenal I train with the boys every day, but with Holland it is once in a while for a short period. You cannot compare the

two. Nearer to a tournament, though, we have more time to train, play together and adjust to each other, so it’s something we are used to.

As in the World Cup in South Africa, Holland are staying in a city-centre hotel. Is it good to be among the fans during the tournament?

Most of the time when we are in the hotel we hardly see what is going on outside it. That said, in South Africa we stayed in a very nice place where the staff would dance and sing for us after every game, and because of this we got to see a bit of the culture. In Poland and Ukraine it might be a different story because we’re going to be closer to home, so maybe we will be able to see more of the fans this time around.

Are you hoping to meet Spain at some stage in the tournament so you can make amends for the World Cup Final defeat?

Sport is about winning and losing – they won the World Cup and there are no hard feelings there. To be honest, they were the better side that day. But it is always nice to play a good side so, yes, it would be nice to face them again.

Are there any youngsters in the Dutch team to look out for?

We have a lot of talented young players and it’s a pleasure to see them all developing very quickly. Gini Wijnaldum and Jeremain Lens of PSV are good examples to watch, along with Luuk De Jong at Twente. There are other upcoming talents too, so the future looks bright.

What are your memories of the Dutch team that won the Euros in 1988?

I was only five years old back then so I don’t remember too much about it at the time, but I have seen the footage many times since. That team has always been, and still is, one that I look up to. It was full of amazing players and achieved great things for our country. I hope we can do the same – and hopefully my son, who is now five himself, will be able to remember it.

If Holland don’t win Euro 2012, who will?

Obviously I hope we are going to win it, but if for any reason we can’t there are many teams in the running. There are a lot of favourites at the moment and we are one of them. But, as I said earlier, you cannot underestimate anybody.

Interview by Nick Ames

THE VIEW FROM HOLLAND



“I’m not worried about players who haven’t played much at their clubs. Form just comes and goes, especially with wingers. Germany are my favourites. They have the best, fittest and most attack-minded team.

However, I wouldn’t begrudge Van Marwijk the title. He is still the same down-to-earth man he used to be as my team-mate at AZ when I was 17”

Hans Kraaij Jr, national team correspondent for TV station SBS



“I don’t expect to see anything new at Euro 2012. All the teams will play 4-2-3-1, with only Spain, Holland and Germany taking initiatives. But sometimes incidents decide whether things will go right or wrong. After all, Holland won in 1988 with Marco Van Basten as an outstanding player, but he wasn’t in the starting line-up in the first match they played and lost”

Henk Fraser, assistant coach of Holland under-21s and a 1990 World Cup player

“The title race will be between Spain, Germany and Holland. I can’t imagine any other country taking the crown. Only France are a dark horse. All the favourites, with the exception of Spain, have had their ups and downs. I’ll rate Spain 35 per cent, Germany 30 per cent and Holland with a 25 per cent chance. But it will be useless if we play without Klaas-Jan Huntelaar. Van Marwijk can’t ignore him any longer. I think starting with either Robin Van Persie or Wesley Sneijder will be much more an issue”

Jan-Hermen de Bruijn, editor of football magazine Elf

GOALKEEPERS



Tim KRUL

Age 24 (03.04.88)
Newcastle United (Eng)
QR: 0 games
Left Den Haag to join Newcastle after being spotted at the European Under-17 Championship. Went on loan to Carlisle United and Falkirk before making his Premier League breakthrough this season.



Maarten STEKELENBURG

Age 29 (22.09.82)
Roma (Ita)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Suffered a serious head injury when clashing with Internazionale's Lucio in September, but recovered quickly. Known as *'Olandese volante'* (the flying Dutchman) in the Italian capital. Deaf in one ear.



Michel VORM

Age 28 (20.10.83)
Swansea City (Wal)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Moved to Wales at the start of the season from Utrecht and has played a key role in Swansea's surprise success. Known for his penalty saving abilities. Understudy to Stekelenburg.

COACH

Bert VAN MARWIJK

Age 59 (19.05.52)
Holland coach since July 2008
Father-in-law of Mark Van Bommel who creates a family atmosphere around the squad despite demanding the best. Won one cap for his country, as a left-winger, and coached Feyenoord to the 2002 UEFA Cup. Returned to Feyenoord after a spell at Borussia Dortmund and became Holland coach after Euro 2008. Has renewed his contract until 2016. Was decorated Knight of Orange-Nassau. The square where he grew up, in Deventer, has been named after him.



DEFENDERS



Khalid BOULAHROUZ

Age 30 (28.12.81)
Stuttgart (Ger)
QR: 0 games
Struggled in his first three seasons at Stuttgart but is now a regular. Can play at right-back or in the centre, he is nicknamed "The Cannibal" for eliminating his opponents. Of Moroccan descent.



Jeffrey BRUMA

Age 20 (13.11.91)
Chelsea (Eng)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Moved from Feyenoord to Chelsea at the age of 15 and has been on loan at Hamburg this season. His brother Marciano played for Barnsley, while cousin Kyle Ebicilio is an Arsenal youth player.



Urby EMANUELSON

Age 25 (16.06.86)
Milan (Ita)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Left-footed utility player who moved from Ajax to Milan in January 2011 and his versatility in defence and midfield has given him a lot of playing time. His father, Errol, played football in Surinam and Belgium.



John HEITINGA

Age 28 (15.11.83)
Everton (Eng)
QR: 7 games/1 goal
Commanding defender who isn't always a regular for his club side. Received a red card from Howard Webb in the World Cup Final, a game he has, despite co-operating on a documentary, never watched.



Joris MATHIJSEN

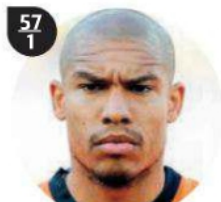
Age 32 (05.04.80)
Malaga (Spa)
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Rarely misses an international despite not always being first choice at club level. Although he is getting slower he knows his own capacities very well. Joined Malaga in summer 2011 after five seasons at Hamburg.

MIDFIELDERS



Ibrahim AFELLAY

Age 26 (02.04.86)
Barcelona (Spa)
QR: 6 games/3 goals
Tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during training in September and faces a fitness battle to make it to Euro 2012. Born in Holland but of Moroccan descent, can play on either flank.



Nigel DE JONG

Age 27 (30.11.84)
Manchester City (Eng)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Tough tackler who has regained favour with the national side. Runs an executive car company with some former Hamburg teammates. His father Jerry won three caps in the 1990s.



Dirk KUYT

Age 31 (22.07.80)
Liverpool (Eng)
QR: 9 games/6 goals
Willing runner and hard worker, Van Marwijk retains confidence in him despite not being a regular in the Premier League this season. Started as a centre-forward but has now moved to the flank.



Wesley SNEIJDER

Age 27 (09.06.84)
Internazionale (Ita)
QR: 8 games/3 goals
Playmaker who is having a miserable season in Serie A: suffering from injuries, often left on the bench and, when picked, exiled to the left wing. A Champions League winner in 2010.



Kevin STROOTMAN

Age 22 (13.02.90)
PSV Eindhoven
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Having left Sparta Rotterdam for Utrecht and then PSV, he has gone from the Dutch second division to the national team in just six months. Intelligent player with good vision and passing ability.

FORWARDS



Luuk DE JONG

Age 21 (27.08.90)
Twente
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Younger brother of Ajax's Siem. Can play in midfield as well as at centre-forward. Strong in the air. Born in Switzerland, his Dutch parents played professional volleyball.



Klaas-Jan HUNTELAAR

Age 28 (12.08.83)
Schalke (Ger)
QR: 8 games/12 goals
A poacher who has rediscovered his touch at Schalke after unhappy spells at Real Madrid and Milan. Extremely dangerous in the penalty area, he has averaged a goal every 93 minutes for the national team.



Ola JOHN

Age 19 (19.05.92)
Twente
QR: 0 games
Two-footed winger who was called up for the friendly against England in February. Born in Liberia, but fled with his mother and brothers at the age of two when his father was killed in the civil war.



Arjen ROBBEN

Age 28 (23.01.84)
Bayern Munich (Ger)
QR: 0 games
Only played in two Holland games in the last two years due to injury problems. Has won national titles in four countries with PSV (Holland), Chelsea (England), Real Madrid (Spain) and Bayern (Germany).



Robin VAN PERSIE

Age 28 (06.08.83)
Arsenal (Eng)
QR: 6 games/6 goals
Didn't meet expectations at the 2010 World Cup, but currently having the best season of his career, scoring 35 goals in 2011. Voted the English PFA's Player of the Year.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Little has changed for Van Marwijk's side since the 2010 World Cup Final

Van Marwijk will stick to his guns – which means that, whenever available, 10 of the players who lined up in South Africa will start. The only change will be at left-back where Giovanni Van Bronckhorst has now retired. Pieters is the likely replacement if he is fit in time after injuring his right foot.

Mathijsen and Heitinga are first choice in the centre, with Jeffrey Bruma as cover. Boulahrouz will understudy Van der Wiel on the right flank.

It is in central midfield that Van Marwijk



4-2-3-1



Erik PIETERS

Age 23 (07.08.88)
PSV Eindhoven
QR: 9 games/0 goals
A European Under-21 winner in 2007, he is the successor to Giovanni Van Bronckhorst at left-back, but a foot injury suffered in April, against RKC Waalwijk, could make him a doubt.



Gregory VAN DER WIEL

Age 24 (03.02.88)
Ajax
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Overlapping right-back who returned to action in April after being out of action with a groin injury since before Christmas. Almost kicked out by Ajax as a youth due to his poor behaviour.



Mark VAN BOMMEL

Age 35 (22.04.77)
Milan (Ita)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Captain and Van Marwijk's son-in-law. Clashed with Louis Van Gaal at Bayern Munich and left for Milan, where he won the league in his first season. A great tactician and vital for the team's balance.



Rafael VAN DER VAART

Age 29 (11.02.83)
Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
QR: 8 games/1 goal
Has found footballing happiness again after failing at Real Madrid. Son of a Dutch father and a Spanish mother, he was raised on a trailer camp. Is married to TV star Sylvie Meijns.



Georginio WIJNALDUM

Age 21 (11.11.90)
PSV Eindhoven
QR: 1 game/1 goal
Was Feyenoord's youngest debutant at 16 years and 148 days in April 2007. Took the surname Boateng of his stepfather for a while. His cousin is Everton's Royston Drenthe, while brother Gilliano plays for AZ.

has the most tactical options. De Jong is the most defensive choice, next to the unquestionable Van Bommel, who gives the team balance. However, if he prefers a more attack-minded variant, Strootman or Van der Vaart can be called upon. Van der Vaart is also a second option as playmaker.

On the flanks, the left-footed Robben and right-footed Kuyt will constantly switch flanks. Afellay, if fit, will provide the necessary back-up.

Up front, even though Huntelaar has a better record, Van Marwijk will opt for Van Persie.

Klaas-Jan Droppert



Hopeful...Huntelaar (left) and Robben

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

Kenneth VERMEER

Age 26 (10.01.86)
Ajax
Caps 0
Athletic keeper who varies spectacular saves with incomprehensible mistakes.

DEFENDERS

Vurnon ANITA

Age 23 (04.04.89)
Ajax
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Can play in defensive midfield as well as either full-back position.

Ron VLAAR

Age 27 (16.02.85)
Feyenoord
Caps 5 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Feyenoord captain and central defender who is strong in the air.

MIDFIELDERS

Wout BRAMA

Age 25 (21.08.86)
Twente
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Hard-working midfielder who has had a good club season.

Otman BAKKAL

Age 27 (27.02.85)
Feyenoord
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Moved to Feyenoord after not seeing eye to eye with PSV coach Fred Rutten. Of Moroccan descent.

Hedwiges MADURO

Age 27 (13.02.85)
Valencia (Spa)
Caps 18 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Can play in central defence as well as midfield.

Stijn SCHAARS

Age 28 (11.04.84)
Sporting Lisbon (Por)
Caps 16 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Plays in midfield for his club, but could be used at left-back.

FORWARDS

Ryan BABEL

Age 25 (19.12.86)
Hoffenheim (Ger)
Caps 43 (5 goals)
QR: 0 games
His chances have been reduced after a below-par performance against Germany.

Roy BEERENS

Age 24 (22.12.87)
AZ
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
A technically gifted right-winger but injury prone.

Eljero ELIA

Age 25 (13.02.87)
Juventus (Ita)
Caps 26 (2 goals)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Rarely starts in Serie A for his club side.

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Hopeful...De Rossi beats Uruguay's Egidio Arevalo during a friendly in November and Italy will need his dynamic midfield drive to help them through a tough opening group



ITALY A work in progress

There are more questions than answers for Prandelli's side



PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

For once, Italy go into a major finals starting from the back of the grid. While qualifying form was sparkling, there are many reasons to suggest that Cesare Prandelli's side remain something of a work in progress and one that perhaps lack the killer punch.

Their tournament begins with a bang against world and European champions Spain in Gdansk. Prandelli believes that this baptism of fire will serve his cause well, leaving his players under no illusions about the task in front of them.

In reality, Italy may have to lift their game to get out of a tough Group C that also includes Croatia and the Republic of Ireland. The point about Prandelli's team is that this group clearly represents a much tougher task than anything his side has faced since he took over in July 2010 in the wake of the disappointing first round World Cup exit in South Africa. At this point, just getting into the knockout stage, thus avoiding the ignominy of two successive first-round tournament eliminations, would have to be seen as a positive.

It could be argued this is an unnecessarily minimalist view of Italy's chances; after all, they romped home in qualifying, winning eight, drawing two and finishing 10 points clear of second-placed Estonia to claim their place in the finals with two games still to play. No Italy side has ever done so well in European qualifiers – and according to opinion polls 55 per cent of Italy fans fancy their chances.

However, it must be remembered that their impressive qualifying run came in the context of a group where Serbia, arguably Italy's strongest rivals, were effectively taken out of the equation

when the game in Genoa on October 12, 2010, was abandoned after only six minutes following violent disturbances by a small number of the 1,600 visiting supporters.

UEFA's inevitable disciplinary decision to award Italy a 3-0 home win was certainly an unexpected bonus. From that point on they were in total control of a group of relatively poor quality. It says much that Estonia made it to the play-offs – even more that they were then taken apart by the Republic of Ireland.

Given a fright

In the opening qualifier, an away win against modest Estonia, Italy were losing with an hour gone and it took two goals in three minutes, by Antonio Cassano and Leonardo Bonucci, both from corners, to turn it round. Despite dominating, Italy had given themselves a fright.

Even last autumn, when qualification was all but in the bag, they again struggled in wins against the Faroe Islands and Slovenia. One had to sympathise with Brian Kerr's industrious Faroes team who were beaten by an arguably offside Cassano goal in the 11th minute and also hit the woodwork twice. As for the Slovenia game, this was decided by an 85th-minute winner from Giampaolo Pazzini.

Add to those less than impressive performances the friendly defeats by the Republic of Ireland last June, Uruguay in November and the USA in February, and questions begin to arise. Is this Prandelli team, with its emphasis on an attacking, quick-passing game, simply rather lightweight? Can the enigmatic Mario Balotelli compensate for

GROUP C

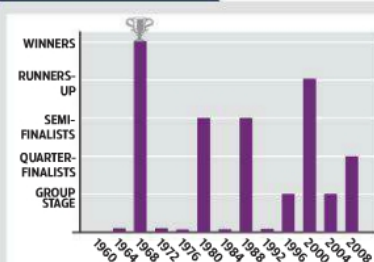
10.06.12	Spain (Gdansk)
14.06.12	Croatia (Poznan)
18.06.12	Republic of Ireland (Poznan)

the injury-enforced absence of Giuseppe Rossi and possibly Cassano too? And can Italy really afford to rely on such a wayward talent?

Attack represents the biggest headache for Prandelli in a side where Gigi Buffon, Giorgio Chiellini, Andrea Pirlo, Daniele Di Rossi and Claudio Marchisio all look certain starters. But will their immense experience see Italy through?

The difficulties posed by Spain are obvious, while Croatia have traditionally caused Italy problems – in qualifying for the 1998 World Cup and at the 2002 finals. Meanwhile, the clash with Giovanni Trapattoni's resilient Irish will naturally attract special attention. Prandelli has every reason to be concerned. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP C

03.09.10	Estonia (a)	2-1
07.09.10	Faroe Islands (h)	5-0
08.10.10	Northern Ireland (a)	0-0
12.10.10	Serbia (h)	A*
25.03.11	Slovenia (a)	1-0
03.06.11	Estonia (h)	3-0
02.09.11	Faroe Islands (a)	1-0
06.09.11	Slovenia (h)	1-0
07.10.11	Serbia (a)	1-1
11.10.11	Northern Ireland (h)	3-0

* abandoned after six minutes and Italy awarded a 3-0 forfeit win

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	10	8	2	0	20*	2	26
Estonia	10	5	1	4	15	14	16
Serbia	10	4	3	3	13	12	15
Slovenia	10	4	2	4	11	7	14
N Ireland	10	2	3	5	9	13	9
Faroes	10	1	1	8	6	26	4

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	USA (h)	0-1
29.05.12	Luxembourg (h)	
01.06.12	Russia (in Switzerland)	

BASE CAMP



Cesare Prandelli

“I felt we should play to our strengths and with the players we have it meant a more attacking game”



Thoughtful...Prandelli and his staff watch Italy's qualifier against Slovenia

You have said that you think it may benefit Italy to play Spain in the opening game. Why is that?

They are undoubtedly the strongest team of the moment, with a whole fleet of class players. Maybe we are lucky that we have to play them first, that way my players will understand what it means to be playing in the European Championship finals. We've got to arrive absolutely ready for that first game.

Inevitably, much Italian media attention has focused on your third game with Giovanni Trapattoni's Republic of Ireland. How do you see that going?

[Laughing] I don't even want to name him or it will bring me bad luck! As soon as you mention his name, he pops up to lay some sort of trap for you! In truth, though, it will be an honour and a pleasure to meet Ireland and Trap. I feel very linked to him, he was my coach at Juventus for six years. For me, he's a reference point and not just from the viewpoint of football technique. Trap's Ireland will make everyone struggle, us included. We have to start off with that in mind, otherwise the game will be very, very difficult. Trap will be a very awkward customer, absolutely.

Is it true that when you played for Trap he kept telling you to drop

back in defence?

Football lives by clichés and labels. In the 1980s Trap had Platini, Boniek, Rossi and Bettega in the same [Juventus] team: two strikers and two attacking midfielders. Obviously, if the other players then go up in attack, well then Trap is going to whistle at me in order to keep the team balanced. But it's absurd to depict Trap as a defensive coach. History shows that he fielded teams that were very, very offensive. Maybe in the final minutes of a game he would maintain a certain balance just to wrap up the result.

And what about the fourth side in your group, Croatia?

As soon as the draw was made everybody was asking me about the games against Spain and Ireland, but my suspicion is that the game against

Croatia could be our most important one. Firstly, because it will be our second game and that is the game that nearly always decides everything in the first round of a tournament. Secondly, because I know Croatia, I know [coach Slaven] Bilic. I am familiar with his work. This is a team which has terrific technique in its DNA, with lots of good players, and for that reason I see this as our most difficult game.

What is the situation with Mario Balotelli? You left him out of the squad for the USA friendly for disciplinary reasons. What does this mean?

I only know one way to develop a team, a squad: you lay down certain rules. The players who have been with me in the Italian squad over the last two years know our rules and regulations. However, in my head, Balotelli is a first-choice player. But this is a moment when he has to show that he has the personality and the capacity to handle the sort of pressure that he is under.

Giuseppe Rossi is definitely out, but what about your other injured striker, Antonio Cassano?

It is a great pity about Rossi, we shall certainly miss him, but I will wait until May for Cassano because he too is an important element in the side that qualified for these finals. They're two players who offer a lot.

Many critics argue that your Italy plays a much more attacking, less typically defensive Italian game. Was that your intention from the outset?

Well, we started off with the idea of involving the players in just how we would play. Many of them felt that the time had come to play – I won't say a different type of game because, in football, there is nothing new – but something else. Given that I have plenty of quality midfielders I felt we should play to our strengths, and with these players that means playing a much more attacking game.

All in all, how do you view the finals?

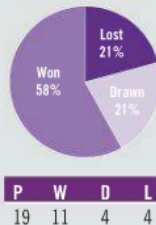
Right now, I have very positive feelings about Euro 2012. There's plenty of time up ahead to get worried about things.

Interview by Paddy Agnew

COACH'S RECORD



Prandelli's 11 victories as Italy coach include the abandoned Euro qualifier against Serbia which was later awarded as a 3-0 win.





lightweights but they're pretty useful! The reality is that we're in the finals on the second row of the grid, behind teams like Spain, Holland and Germany.

Was your qualifying group a bit falsified by the riot in Genoa at the Serbia game, given that, in the end, you picked up three points without having played a game?

Not at all. Our group was no contest, we won by 10 points though obviously we would have preferred to beat Serbia on the pitch. It was a strange night. It all seemed normal during the warm-up. Then when the national anthems were being played we noticed strange things happening, police filing into the ground. In the end there were so many police on the pitch that we didn't feel in danger.

What is your preferred position, central defence or left-back?

I prefer central defence, but being asked to play left-back is no problem. I think I can do pretty well in either position.

Can Andrea Pirlo still do the same job for Italy as he has done this season for Juventus?

Of course, he is such a quality player. He did it for Milan for so many years, for Italy at the 2006 World Cup and he has been fantastic for us at Juve.

Interview by Paddy Agnew

Giorgio Chiellini

“You can call us lightweight up front but look at Spain – they’ve got a lot of lightweights and they’re pretty useful!”

You collected a degree in company management at the University of Turin in the summer of 2010. What made you want to do a degree?

I went to a *liceo* [high school] and I had always intended to continue with studies but, given that I had begun to play football professionally, I ran out of time. So I picked a degree course that does not oblige you to attend all the lectures and I went from there. If you want to do it, you can. I'm not married, I don't have kids, so I have time.

And you're not afraid to make full use of the online social networks for keeping in touch with fans...

I think Twitter is the best way for me to stay in contact with fans. I try to interact with them but obviously I cannot reply to everybody. When I was younger I would have done much the same as the fans do now and for that reason I try to be active with Twitter.

What was your initial reaction to Italy's group at Euro 2012?

Not bad. On paper, perhaps the only easier group is Poland's, but then our first-round group in South Africa was meant to be easy and we found out to our cost that that was not the case.

But you have to start against Spain...

True, we have arguably our most difficult game right away, yet, sooner or later,

you're going to meet a team like Spain. The reality of the European Championship is that the difference between elimination and qualification for the next round can be razor thin.

How do you feel about meeting Giovanni Trapattoni's Ireland?

I just hope we can put a halt to Trap's gallop! I've never had Trap as a coach, but he remains a legend of Italian soccer. Destiny is strange. We faced Trap's Ireland in the last World Cup qualifying round when they gave us so much bother and now we meet them in the European finals. Of course, we didn't want to meet him. We've lots of respect for Trap and his team, while it's obviously very special for him to play against Italy. The fact is that we would have been supporting him and Ireland like mad – if only they were playing in another group.

Prandelli has been warning everyone not to forget about Croatia, too...

Croatia are one of those sides that have to be included in the ranks of dangerous outsiders at any finals. Let's hope they are not like Russia in 2008 and spring a major surprise. In the Euros you just need two good results and you're away.

Do Italy look a little lightweight in midfield and attack?

You can say we're lightweights up front, but look at Spain – they have a lot of

THE VIEW FROM ITALY



“This is obviously a very tough group. Spain, the reigning European and world champions, even if they have the problem of the Real-Barcelona rivalry within the squad, are still much more of a team than Italy. Croatia, like all sides from the former Yugoslavia, get really motivated when they play against teams like Italy. And finally you have Trapattoni's Ireland, which might be a modest team but they have already proven that they can beat Italy and they do not lose many games. If Italy do get through the first round then morale will be sky high and it is possible that they would then go a long way in the tournament”

Fabio Licari, Gazzetta dello Sport

“I think Italy will get through the first round because this is a team which, unlike some Italy teams in the past, has its own game plan. This team does not set itself up in reaction to its opponent's tactics but tries to impose its own game, based on quality and possession”

Marco Ansaldo, La Stampa

“Prandelli clearly has problems in attack. He has lost his first-choice attack of the qualifying round, namely Giuseppe Rossi and Antonio Cassano. Rossi is definitely out injured and we don't know what condition Cassano will be in because he is on the way back from a heart scare. On top of that, his next choice, Mario Balotelli, is a player who doesn't exactly inspire confidence given that he is quite capable of getting himself suspended in the opening game”

Fabrizio Bocca, La Repubblica

GOALKEEPERS



113
0

Gianluigi BUFFON

Age 34 (28.01.78)
Juventus
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Despite a post-South Africa World Cup injury problem which kept him out for seven months last season, he remains the automatic first choice for club and country. He was given the captaincy by Prandelli.



4
0

Morgan DE SANCTIS

Age 35 (26.03.77)
Napoli
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Even though he has rarely played since making his international debut in 2005, such has been his form throughout the season with Napoli that he seems certain to start off as second choice.



2
0

Salvatore SIRIGU

Age 25 (12.01.87)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Will be in contention with Marchetti of Lazio and Viviano of Palermo for the third keeper spot but he may just have the edge thanks to a good first season outside Italy.

COACH

Cesare PRANDELLI

Age 54 (19.08.57)
Italy coach since July 2010
A European Cup winner as a player with Juventus, he was in charge of Fiorentina for five seasons. He steered them into the Champions League and was named Coach of the Year in 2008 before replacing Marcello Lippi as national team boss after the 2010 World Cup. His first game in charge was at West Ham United's Upton Park ground in London – a 1-0 defeat against Ivory Coast. Had a brief spell in charge of Roma in 2004 but quit when his wife became ill with breast cancer.



DEFENDERS



2
0

Ignazio ABATE

Age 25 (12.11.86)
Milan
QR: 0 games
Attacking right-back who is suited to the Prandelli style and a player who has picked up valuable experience in recent seasons. Played for the Italian team at the 2008 Olympics.



7
0

Federico BALZARETTI

Age 30 (06.12.81)
Palermo
QR: 4 games/0 goals 
An attacking left-back, his glitzy wedding to glamorous actress Eleonora Abbagnato last summer made lots of headlines. Previously with Torino, Juventus and Fiorentina, he has thrived at Palermo.



28
0

Andrea BARZAGLI

Age 30 (08.05.81)
Juventus
QR: 2 games/0 goals
A member of the 2006 World Cup-winning squad – he played against Australia and Ukraine – he was recalled last autumn after a three-year absence, thanks to his good form with his club side.



50
2

Giorgio CHIELLINI

Age 27 (14.08.84)
Juventus
QR: 10 games/0 goals
Another of the foundation stones in the post-2010 team, he offers not only true central defensive grit but also a certain versatility since he can also be effective at left-back.



19
0

Domenico CRISCITO

Age 25 (30.12.86)
Zenit (Rus)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Started out in central defence but now preferred at left-back. Played at the 2010 World Cup and moved to Russia from Genoa a year later.

MIDFIELDERS



71
10

Daniele DE ROSSI

Age 28 (24.07.83)
Roma
QR: 7 games/1 goal
Able to both cover and create, he reportedly became Serie A's highest-paid Italian player in February when signing a new five-year deal worth £5.4m a year. His father is Roma's youth coach.



19
1

Claudio MARCHISIO

Age 26 (19.01.86)
Juventus
QR: 6 games/1 goal
Often referred to as the "new Tardelli", he likes to get forward and has scored his fair share of goals for Juve this season.



32
1

Riccardo MONTOLIVO

Age 27 (18.01.85)
Fiorentina
QR: 8 games/0 goals 
Another to have survived South Africa 2010, but he has not been helped by his club's poor season. One of the few linguists in his squad, he speaks German as his mother comes from Kiel.



7
1

Thiago MOTTA

Age 29 (28.08.82)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
QR: 3 games/1 goal 
A key figure with Jose Mourinho's treble-winning Internazionale before heading for France. Played for Brazil under-23s but was able to switch allegiance as his ancestors come from the Veneto area of Italy.



10
0

Antonio NOCERINO

Age 27 (09.04.85)
Milan
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Given his first cap in March last year by Prandelli as a second-half substitute in a 1-0 win in Slovenia. Has further confirmed his squad place with an excellent first season after joining Milan from Palermo.

FORWARDS



7
1

Mario BALOTELLI

Age 21 (12.08.90)
Manchester City (Eng)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Controversial character who Prandelli left out of the side for the 1-0 defeat by the USA in February for disciplinary reasons. Similar problems could see him leave Manchester City this summer.



1
0

Fabio BORINI

Age 21 (29.03.91)
Roma
QR: 0 games
Former Bologna and Chelsea striker who made his debut in the friendly against the USA. His sharpness as a poacher has earned him comparisons with Pippo Inzaghi.



36
10

Antonio DI NATALE

Age 34 (13.10.77)
Udinese
QR: 0 games
Doubts over Cassano could mean a recall to a side he played for at the 2010 World Cup. Leading Serie A scorer for the last two seasons, he has also scored regularly this term.



5
1

Alessandro MATRI

Age 27 (19.08.84)
Juventus
QR: 0 games
Target man who may be carried along on the tidal wave of an excellent Juventus season. Scored on his debut in a 2-0 friendly win over Ukraine in March 2011 and has played regularly since.



2
0

Pablo OSVALDO

Age 26 (12.01.86)
Roma
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Made his debut in Italy's final qualifier. Born in Buenos Aires, he allegedly punched compatriot Erik Lamela in the dressing room after Roma's defeat by Udinese.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Mixed results as Prandelli puts the accent on attack

Prandelli's Italy might surprise those who did not see them in the qualifying rounds as, in terms of both playing personnel and tactical disposition, they are less defence obsessed and more attack oriented than some previous Italian teams.

Not that they don't have a solid defensive backbone that runs from Buffon in goal through Chiellini in defence and on to such as De Rossi and Motta in midfield. These four players form the solid structure on which playmaker Pirlo can



15
0

Christian MAGGIO

Age 30 (11.02.82)
Napoli
QR: 4 games/0 goals
One of the key figures in Napoli's success this season, he is the classic attacking full-back whose natural style suits Prandelli perfectly.



2
0

Angelo OGBONNA

Age 23 (23.05.88)
Torino
QR: 0 games
Born in Italy of Nigerian parents, he can play at left-back or in the centre. Impressed in the USA friendly in February.



23
0

Simone PEPE

Age 28 (30.08.83)
Juventus
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Can play on either flank and has also appeared as an emergency left-back. There was talk of a move from Juve last summer, but coach Antonio Conte persuaded him to stay and he has had a fine season.



82
9

Andrea PIRLO

Age 32 (19.05.79)
Juventus
QR: 9 games/1 goal
Has surprised many by playing some of his best-ever football this season for Juve since leaving Milan, living up to his reputation as one of the great midfield schemers in the modern game.

weave his magic, making the most of the far younger legs of attacking full-backs Balzaretti and Maggio, attacking midfielder Marchisio who plays alongside him, as well as Balotelli, Matri, Pazzini et al in attack.

A feature of the team is its neat passing and constant off-the-ball movement, allegedly inspired by the Barcelona model, although that, frankly, would be saying too much. However, it is not quite the Italy that, over the years, have been loved or loathed.

Interestingly, Prandelli claims he settled on this more attacking model after consultation with his players. So far, though, it has not entirely looked convincing, with his side often looking pretty and busy but ineffectual, and lacking true bite up front.

Paddy Agnew



Young legs...Maggio



24
4

Giampaolo PAZZINI

Age 27 (02.08.84)
Internazionale
QR: 8 games/2 goals
Despite a miserable season with Inter, he was a regular throughout the qualifying group, coming off the bench to score the winner in a 1-0 win against Slovenia last September.

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER Federico MARCHETTI

Age 29 (07.02.83)
Lazio
Caps 8 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
A dispute with Cagliari meant he missed out on all of last season.

DEFENDERS Leonardo BONUCCI

Age 24 (01.05.87)
Juventus
Caps 13 (2 goals)
QR: 6 games/1 goal
An experienced central defender.

Mattia CASSANI

Age 28 (26.08.83)
Fiorentina
Caps 10 (0 goals)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Full-back who can operate on either flank.

Andrea RANOCCHIA

Age 24 (16.02.88)
Internazionale
Caps 8 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Central defender.

MIDFIELDERS Alberto AQUILANI

Age 27 (07.07.84)
Liverpool (Eng)
Caps 21 (3 goals)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Talented but injury prone, he has been on loan to Milan this season.

Stefano MAURI

Age 32 (08.01.80)
Lazio
Caps 11 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Left-footed winger.

FORWARDS Antonio CASSANO

Age 29 (12.07.82)
Milan
Caps 28 (9 goals)
QR: 10 games/6 goals
Underwent minor heart surgery last year following a stroke, but still hopes to be fit for the Euros.

Sebastiano GIOVINCO

Age 25 (26.01.87)
Parma
Caps 7 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Made his international debut under Prandelli.



POLAND

Weight of expectation

The pressure is on coach Smuda's co-hosts to fulfil a nation's dream



DARIUSZ KUROWSKI
in Warsaw

There may have been none of the pressure of a qualifying tournament for Franciszek Smuda over the past 18 months, but there has been plenty of heat on the Poland coach since he took over from Leo Beenhakker

in 2009. Although they were only playing friendlies, an eight-month run without a win in 2010 had Smuda's detractors calling for his head, an outcry which only subsided somewhat after a 3-1 victory over Ivory Coast.

On his appointment, Smuda had promised his Poland would be playing "offensive and attractive football", although a 6-0 thrashing by Spain in June 2010 made everyone realise that such a notion was but a dream. Even if he could

later argue that his side had been beaten by the future world champions a few days before they started their campaign in South Africa, the painful lesson for Smuda was in discovering he did not have the personnel for his grand plan.

His biggest problem was his defence. And when he could not find the necessary players domestically to secure his back line he went looking abroad, persuading those who had been born in Poland but then moved to Germany to



Heading for a fall...Poland's Tomasz Jodlowiec goes down under pressure from the Bosnia-Herzegovina defence in December

join his team. Werder Bremen left-back Sebastian Boenisch, and defensive midfielders Adam Matuszczyk of Cologne and Eugen Polanski of Mainz all switched allegiance and were handed their international debuts. Similarly, central defender Damien Perquis of Sochaux, who was born in France but has a Polish grandfather, also joined up.

And although there have been many critics of his "returning" national-team players, Smuda has stuck to his policy.

Boenisch, in particular, was an extremely important addition. Left-backs have been a traditional Polish problem and during Euro 2008 Beenhakker used three different players in the position in their three games.

However, no sooner had one problem been solved than another surfaced: injuries. After two knee operations, Boenisch's appearances in the Bundesliga this season have been severely limited, while Perquis fractured an elbow in March and faces a battle to be fit in time.

There was an even bigger disappointment in February when star striker Robert Lewandowski could not play in the friendly against Portugal because of a muscle injury.

Theoretically Smuda has two experienced replacements in Pawel Brozek and Ireneusz Jelen. Brozek had scored regularly with Wisla Krakow for years, while Jelen was a fixture with French side Auxerre. Unfortunately, both moved clubs and neither is a regular starter these days. So maybe Smuda will have to take a risk on a youngster such as Artur Sobiech of Hanover or Ruch Chorzow's Maciej Jankowski.

The aim is clear

No matter who makes up the final squad of 23, Smuda's aim is quite clear: to get out of the group and into the knockout stage. With former Poland star Zbigniew Boniek describing the Group A pairing with Russia, Greece and Czech Republic, as "the easiest possible one", Smuda's players can blame only themselves if they do not make the last-eight phase, despite being

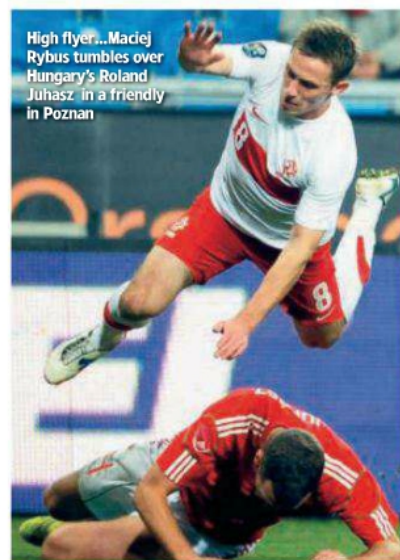
GROUP A

08.06.12	Greece (Warsaw)
12.06.12	Russia (Warsaw)
16.06.12	Czech Republic (Wroclaw)

the worst team at the tournament according to the FIFA rankings.

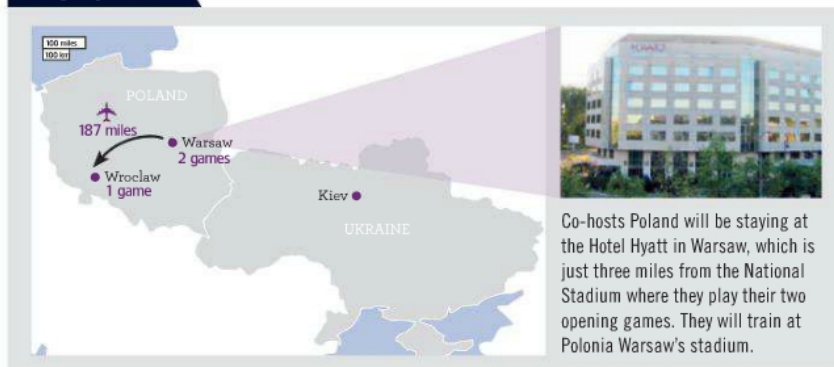
When Poland and Ukraine were chosen as co-hosts the then Polish FA chairman, Michal Listkiewicz, said: "The dream is coming true. It is the most important day in Polish football ever." Five years have passed and another "most important day" looms as Smuda's team face Greece at the National Stadium in Warsaw on June 8 to launch Euro 2012.

The biggest sporting event ever organised in the country will bring the biggest pressure ever to bear on the national team as well. But if Smuda's players can handle the weight of expectation, they might just have a chance to fulfil the dream of a whole nation. **WS**

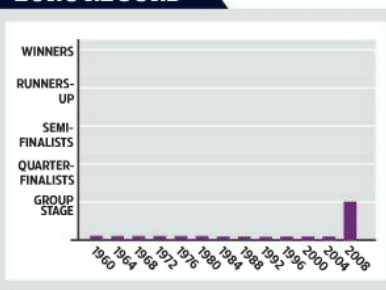


High flyer...Maciej Rybus tumbles over Hungary's Roland Juhász in a friendly in Poznan

BASE CAMP



EURO RECORD



FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Portugal (h)	0-0
22.05.12	Latvia (in Austria)	
26.05.12	Slovakia (in Austria)	
02.06.12	Andorra (h)	

Franciszek Smuda

“Some of the team were born in Poland then went abroad for different reasons. Why should they not play for us?”

Poland have played only friendlies since 2009. Does that really matter to you?

For me there are no friendly games. All internationals, even ones not in a competition, are very important because you play for prestige. We knew that to prepare well for Euro 2012 we should think in this way.

What is the most important progress the team has made since 2009?

We do not give away so many goals, the players have a better appreciation of tactical principles and we play our football in a faster, one-touch way to show our fans an attractive style. Even if we draw or lose – like the 2-1 defeat by Australia – we create a lot of scoring opportunities. The team are playing to the best of their ability and that is very important to me.

Which players have made the most progress individually?

It is better to say that the team as a whole have made progress. Two-and-a-half years ago I had only one player, Dariusz Dudka, who had experience of big tournaments. He is still in my team but it's a totally new team compared to 2009. I see a real progress and I am optimistic.

You have a young side with an average age of 23 to 24...

That's because I wanted to have them ready for the World Cup 2014 qualifying campaign. I do not want to create the same situation that I had when I took over. Whoever is national coach after Euro 2012 should have a team that is ready to play and that should make his task a bit easier.

Why did you say that your team are better appreciated abroad than in Poland?

Because it is true. In Poland we come in for strong criticism. When we drew 2-2 with Germany last year, the Germans praised us more than the Poles.

What has been your most difficult moment since taking over? Maybe those few months without victory in successive games?

It was obvious to me that we could not win all the games during the team-building process. On the other

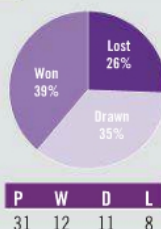


Criticised...Smuda

COACH'S RECORD



Poland's form in friendlies has been patchy since being named co-hosts. Smuda's record during that time is six wins, eight draws and five defeats.



P	W	D	L
31	12	11	8

hand, we don't have the kind of players we had during the 1970s or 1980s.

You have also said there is no real individuality in this generation...

For me individuality is a player like Messi. We don't have such players so we should do our best to be strong as a team.

Are injuries a big concern?

We have never played with the optimal starting XI. Last year against Mexico I could not use 11 first-choice players. You must realise that we are not strong enough to face opponents when we have five or six starters missing.

Did you suggest to a few players that they should change clubs during the winter transfer window in order

to play regular first-team football before the Euro finals?

Yes. Ludovic Obraniak moved to Bordeaux and started to play at once. But he is an excellent player. Unfortunately another one, Pawel Brozek, has had no luck and he is not even a substitute after being loaned from Trabzonspor to Celtic.

And because of that you have no back-up for Robert Lewandowski among the forwards...

That is true as forwards like Brozek or Ireneusz Jelen from Lille are out of form. Artur Sobiech from Hanover is a different matter. He is a very talented young player and has shown his potential, scoring a few goals when given a chance for 15 or 30 minutes. I am sure he will make progress.

The Polish media have often said you should recall Fiorentina goalkeeper Artur Boruc. Are you likely to change your mind?

Boruc has had his time. He made too many mistakes in his Poland career, on and off the field. We have so many talented goalkeepers. Now is time for the younger generation.

Some say there are too many "foreigners" in the side, those who only play for Poland because they have no chance to be called up by France or Germany. What do you think of such opinion?

They are Poles. Some were born here, then, for different reasons, went abroad. Why should they not play for Poland? We have still so many malcontents in the country. I'll give you an example. One journalist told me to move as fast as possible for Sebastian Boenisch because he could play for Germany. When I did, the same journalist asked me: "Why did you pick him?" There is too much envy in the country. I would like there to be more satisfaction.

What do you think of Poland's group?

It is a treacherous group. Russia and Greece are favourites, while the Czech Republic have built a very interesting team. We have to be totally concentrated in each game and do our best to reach the knockout stage, which is our aim.

Interview by Dariusz Kurowski



Full stretch...Lewandowski (right) tussles with Germany's Jerome Boateng during the 2-2 draw in Gdansk last September

Robert Lewandowski

“The pressure is huge, not only on me but on the whole team. I’m ready for it”

Leo Beenhakker, who gave you your Poland debut, called you the future of Polish football. Is it hard living with such pressure?

I suppose it's not so bad. I don't have a problem with such things. I am not afraid of anything because I am mentally strong.

Not even on June 8 in Warsaw, the city where you were born, when Poland will be playing Greece and the whole nation will be looking to you for inspiration?

Of course, I know that the pressure is huge. Not only the pressure on me, but on the whole team. Anyway, I am ready for that and I simply have to face such a challenge. The most important thing for us is to win our games. If my goals can help then all the better.

Poland have not played a competitive game since 2009. Do you think this will be a problem for the team?

No, I think everything is going in the right direction. We have real potential in the team, thanks to our players being with some very good European clubs. We have a good skill level and you can see an improvement in the style of our play. Poland is not strong because of individuals but as a team. That is the most important thing for us. If we are a real team, and each player gives this

team something extra as well, we will be able to surprise our rivals. I believe that from the first group game on we will prove this and we will show our best.

People say Poland have been drawn in the best group possible, but you are still the lowest-ranked team in FIFA rankings...

I understand that our fans are very optimistic and that is quite natural. But, for us, it will not be an easy group for sure. It is obvious, we know it very well. Of course, we are at home and we will try to win each game. On the other hand, you can only see which group was easy or strong after the tournament.

How did you feel last year when you drew 2-2 with Germany in Gdansk, conceding a goal in the last seconds of injury time?

It was a painful experience because we were so close to winning. But that was a very good lesson for us and that goal could be profitable. We should draw our conclusions from this and hope we will not make the same mistake again.

You are the only forward in the coach's preferred 4-2-3-1 system. But in a recent interview you suggested that it might be worth playing with two forwards...

Our coach prefers that system so there is no sense in discussing it further. I have

a role as the only forward and many teams play in the same way. If you want to use another one, you should have a deeper squad with more replacements. And at the moment we have a little problem with that.

That point was proved when you were injured and missed February's friendly against Portugal. Everyone was lamenting Poland's lack of attacking options...

Injuries are a nightmare for every team, especially before such a tournament as the Euros. We can only hope that all the players in form can be called on and that the coach will have more options.

What will be regarded as a success for Poland at Euro 2012?

Qualifying for the knockout stage.

If you do qualify you will then face either Holland, Germany, Portugal or Denmark...

It is not an easy task, for sure. The most important thing for us is to qualify for the knockout stage. If so, you never know. If you win, you are euphoric and sometimes you can do even more than could have been expected. And I believe that we will feel the support of our fans who will back us in every game during the finals. In the last few games it was not always as it should be. It can be very important for the team. But first we need to take the first step and qualify for the knockout stage.

Interview by Dariusz Kurowski

THE VIEW FROM POLAND



“It is not an easy task for Poland. I do not know whether a young team can cope with the huge pressure of being the hosts. The group draw was quite good for us. Russia will be favourites, but we are able to beat Czech

Republic and Greece and get through to the quarter-finals to fulfil expectations of the whole nation”

Former Poland goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek

“We are not the group favourites and theoretically we should finish last. If we get through it will be a great success. The most important thing will be the first game. If we win, victory can give us an extra power. If not, two more games will be very difficult”

Dariusz Szpakowski, Polish TV's best-known commentator



“We have a nice, quite young and very brave team, hungry for success. Greece's example in 2004 showed that the European Championship could be a lottery and you can spread happiness.

They did not play very attractive football but were extremely effective. It's difficult to expect that we can do the same, but I am sure Poland will play with great heart”

Janusz Panasewicz, singer with rock band Lady Pank and a football columnist



GOALKEEPERS

Lukasz FABIANSKI

Age 27 (18.04.85)
Arsenal (Eng)
 Won the Polish title with Legia before joining Arsenal in 2007. Was on the bench during the World Cup 2006 and Euro 2008. Last season, because of injury, he was replaced by Szczesny as first choice for club and country.


Wojciech SZCZESNY

Age 22 (18.04.90)
Arsenal (Eng)
 Undisputed first choice despite his relative inexperience. The son of Maciej Szczesny, the former international keeper who won five Polish titles with four different clubs.


Przemyslaw TYTON

Age 24 (23.05.87)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
 Played only 20 league games for Gornik Leznica before joining Dutch club Roda in 2007. Suffered serious concussion while on loan to PSV in September 2011 before signing permanently in January.

COACH
Franciszek SMUDA

Age 63 (22.06.48)
Poland coach since October 2009

The last man to lead a Polish club side to the group stage of the Champions League – Widzew Lodz in 1996 – he won the domestic title as a coach with Widzew (1996 and 1997) and Wisla Krakow (1999), while also enjoying domestic cup success with Lech Poznan (2009). A former defender, he represented sides in the USA and Germany – where he began his coaching career.


DEFENDERS

Sebastian BOENISCH

Age 25 (01.02.87)
Werder Bremen (Ger)
 Recalled to the national set-up for February's friendly against Portugal after more than a year out with a knee injury. Played for Germany under-20 and under-21 sides before opting to represent the country of his birth.


Arkadiusz GLOWACKI

Age 33 (13.03.79)
Trabzonspor (Tur)
 Experienced central defender who spent 10 years with Wisla Krakow and won six league titles before moving to Trabzonspor in 2010. Injury prone, but an alternative to Waslewski or Perquis if fit.


Tomasz JODLOWIEC

Age 26 (08.09.85)
Polonia Warsaw
 Central defender or defensive midfielder who made his name with Dyskobolia Grodzisk before the club merged with Polonia. Made his debut as a substitute in a 2010 World Cup qualifier against Czech Republic in October 2008.


Damien PERQUIS

Age 28 (10.04.84)
Sochaux (Fra)
 Central defender who was born in France but has Polish descent thanks to his grandmother. Made his debut in a friendly against Germany in September 2011. Faces a race to be fit after fracturing an elbow in March.


Lukasz PISZCZEK

Age 26 (03.06.85)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
 Former striker who is now a right-back. Settled well at Dortmund after his move from Hertha Berlin in 2010.

MIDFIELDERS

Jakub BLASZCZYKOWSKI

Age 26 (14.12.85)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
 Technically good and likes to attack from the right. Captain and one of Poland's most important players. He is a nephew of Jerzy Brzezczek, the former Gornik Zabrze midfielder who captained Poland to silver at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.


Dariusz DUDKA

Age 28 (09.12.83)
Auxerre (Fra)
 Versatile player, who can operate as a central defender, full-back or defensive midfielder. Useful at breaking down opposition attacks, then opening up defences with long passes. Played at the World Cup in 2006 and Euro 2008.


Adam MATUSZCZYK

Age 23 (14.02.89)
Cologne (Ger)
 Defensive midfielder who as a child moved with his parents to Germany. Made his debut in 2010 in a friendly against Finland. Joined second division German side Fortuna Dusseldorf on loan in January.


Adrian MIERZEJEWSKI

Age 25 (06.11.86)
Trabzonspor (Tur)
 Creative influence who was voted the best player in the Polish Ekstraklasa last season before moving from Polonia Warsaw to Turkey for a reported Polish domestic league record of £4.7m.


Rafal MURAWSKI

Age 30 (09.10.81)
Lech Poznan
 Defensive midfielder who is a hard worker and one of Smuda's favourites. Has a big heart and can create a scoring opportunity with a precise pass. Came back to Lech after winning the Russian title with Rubin Kazan in 2009.

FORWARDS

Pawel BROZEK

Age 29 (21.04.83)
Trabzonspor (Tur)
 Made his name with Wisla Krakow in the Polish Ekstraklasa before moving, together with his twin brother Piotr, to Trabzonspor in 2011. Joined Scottish champions Celtic on loan in January.


Kamil GROSICKI

Age 23 (08.06.88)
Sivasspor (Tur)
 Winger whose pace always causes danger for opponents when he runs from deep. Moved to Sivasspor last year from Jagiellonia Bialystok and could join one of the big Turkish clubs soon.


Robert LEWANDOWSKI

Age 23 (21.08.88)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
 Centre-forward who is good with his feet and his head. After his transfer from Lech Poznan in 2010 he became a big Bundesliga star in his second season with Dortmund. Poland's Player of the Year in 2011.


Maciej RYBUS

Age 25 (19.08.86)
Terek Grozny (Rus)
 Quick and dynamic on the left flank, he gained experience with Legia Warsaw in the Ekstraklasa and Europa League before moving to Terek in February. Made his debut for Poland against Romania in November 2009.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

After tinkering with the formation, it's now back to basics for Smuda

Having tried to modify Poland's style by experimenting with one defensive midfielder (4-1-4-1), the "Christmas tree" (4-3-2-1) and two strikers (4-4-2), Smuda now looks likely to rely on his favourite 4-2-3-1.

While first-choice keeper Szczesny is one of the best around, the back line in front of him are the coach's biggest problem with injury concerns over Perquis and Boenisch. Smuda is also



4-2-3-1



45
1

Marcin WASILEWSKI

Age 31 (09.06.80)
Anderlecht (Bel)
Uncompromising right-back or central defender whose aggressive approach earns him his share of yellow cards. Fractured a leg against Standard Liege in August 2009 but came back as strong as ever after 10 months out.



25
0

Jakub WAWRZYNIAK

Age 28 (07.07.83)
Legia Warsaw
Natural left-footed defender who has a very good season with Legia and replaced the injured Boenisch at left-back.



17
0

Grzegorz WOJTKOWIAK

Age 28 (26.01.84)
Lech Poznan
Right-back or central defender. A key player for Lech, who won the Polish Cup in 2009 and the championship a year later.

struggling to find a playmaker to operate in the centre of midfield.

The flanks, however, provide plenty of outlet through Blaszczykowski and Rybus. Skipper Blaszczykowski, in particular, plays a very important role for the side, partly thanks to his good understanding with his Borussia Dortmund team-mates Piszczek and Lewandowski.

Like Szczesny, Lewandowski is one of the few real stars in the team with the ability to lead Poland to victory.

Dariusz Kurowski



21
4

Ludovic OBRANIAK

Age 27 (10.11.84)
Bordeaux (Fra)
Born in France, but qualifies to play for Poland through a Polish grandfather. He moved from Lille to Bordeaux in January.



5
0

Eugen POLANSKI

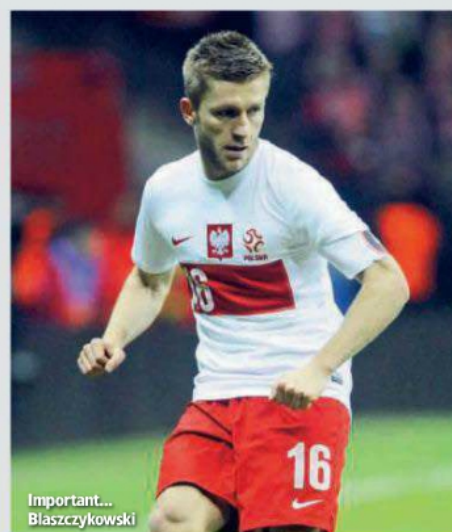
Age 26 (17.03.86)
Mainz (Ger)
Defensive midfielder who was born in Poland and as a child moved with his parents to Germany. Capped by Germany at under-16 to under-21 level, he made his Poland debut against Georgia in August 2011.



0
0

Rafal WOLSKI

Age 19 (10.11.92)
Legia Warsaw
The find of the domestic season. An attacking, right-sided player with good technical skill and great vision who can create as well as score.



Important...
Blaszczykowski

ALSO IN CONTENTION

DEFENDERS

Marcin KAMINSKI

Age 20 (15.01.92)
Lech Poznan
Caps 1 (0 goals)
Versatile player who would provide cover all across the back line.

Marcin KOMOROWSKI

Age 28 (17.04.84)
Terek Grozny (Rus)
Caps 6 (0 goals)
Left-footed central defender or left-back who joined Terek from Legia Warsaw in January.

MIDFIELDERS

Janusz GOL

Age 26 (11.11.85)
Legia Warsaw
Caps 6 (0 goals)
Uncompromising defensive or central midfielder who joined Legia from Belchatow last year.

Michal ZYRO

Age 19 (20.09.92)
Legia Warsaw
Caps 0
Left-footed, capped many times by Poland at youth level.

FORWARDS

Maciej JANKOWSKI

Age 22 (04.01.90)
Ruch Chorzow
Caps 1 (0 goals)
Promising youngster who is an important player for Ruch.

Ireneusz JELEN

Age 31 (09.04.81)
Lille (Fra)
Caps 29 (5 goals)
Struggled to get a starting place with Lille after joining from Auxerre last August.

Michal KUCHARCZYK

Age 21 (20.03.91)
Legia Warsaw
Caps 4 (0 goals)
Central forward or winger.

Artur SOBIECH

Age 21 (12.06.90)
Hanover (Ger)
Caps 3 (0 goals)
Centre-forward who joined Hanover from Polonia Warsaw last year.

Mobbed...Nani is buried under his teammates after scoring in the 6-2 play-off second-leg victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina



PORTUGAL The Bento bounce

New coach has reinvigorated Euro 2004 runners-up



PEDRO PINTO
in Lisbon

Turbulent, tense and eventually triumphant; that would be an appropriate way to describe Portugal's qualifying campaign for Euro 2012. It was truly a roller-coaster ride which had it all: a change of coach, dressing-room disarray and a dramatic finale featuring a play-off against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

To truly understand what happened, you have to go back to the end of the 2010 World Cup campaign in South Africa. Following a 1-0 defeat by Spain in the last 16, everyone turned on the man in charge, Carlos Queiroz. It wasn't so much the result which frustrated fans and the media, it was the manner in which they lost. Portugal had managed to score in only one of their four matches and criticism of Queiroz's tactics had reached fever pitch. Even Cristiano Ronaldo, his long-time friend and ally, snapped when asked why they had been knocked out. He simply said: "Ask Queiroz."

Needless to say, the atmosphere in the camp when the Euro qualifiers kicked off at home to Cyprus was far from ideal, and when they drew 4-4 the knives were out. It seemed the players, the press and even the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) were against Queiroz. The FPF accused him of denying national doping officials access to players during a visit to the training camp before the World Cup. Queiroz denied it and was eventually cleared, several months later, by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, but he was now an isolated man, and defeat by Norway in the next qualifier spelt the end of his 26-month tenure.

While the bickering between the FPF and Queiroz continued, a new coach was appointed.

Paulo Bento is a former international who had enjoyed a relatively successful coaching spell at Sporting Lisbon. His combative and passionate personality was just what the doctor ordered and he made an immediate impact. He won his first game in charge, against Denmark, and led the team to four more consecutive wins in Group H to boost their qualifying hopes.

Ronaldo spectacular

A convincing 4-0 win over Spain in a friendly in Lisbon showed what this team could do with an attacking mentality and the top players firing on all cylinders. Ronaldo, criticised for indifferent performances under Queiroz, was spectacular and set the tone for the rest of the qualifiers. He scored crucial goals against Cyprus and Iceland and looked more like the player who was terrorising La Liga defences for Real Madrid.

All was not well behind the scenes, however. Jose Bosingwa and Ricardo Carvalho were excluded after clashes with Bento – Bosingwa after being accused of exaggerating an injury in order to miss a friendly; Carvalho for storming out of a training camp in September 2011 after hearing he had been dropped for the qualifier in Cyprus. He apologised, but was not forgiven and his Portugal career came to an untimely end.

The turbulence during a long qualifying campaign helps explain why Portugal didn't qualify directly for Euro 2012. They needed a draw in their final match against Denmark in Copenhagen but lost and were forced into a play-off in which the *Selecção das Quinas'* true colours finally showed when it mattered most. They hammered Bosnia-Herzegovina 6-2 in

GROUP B

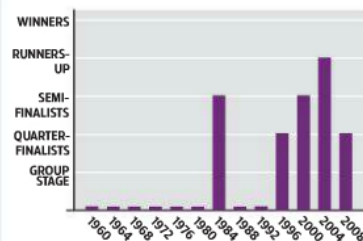
09.06.12	Germany (Lviv, Ukr)
13.06.12	Denmark (Lviv, Ukr)
07.06.12	Holland (Kharkiv, Ukr)

the second leg in Lisbon and the Euro 2004 runners-up finally sealed their place in the finals for a fifth successive time.

Expectations in Portugal are still high heading into the finals. Despite being drawn in the "group of death" alongside Germany, Holland and Denmark, everyone still believes that, with Nani and Ronaldo, anything is possible.

With Braga and Sporting Lisbon finishing strongly, will Hugo Viana or Andre Martins get a surprise call-up? Viana could offer much-needed creativity, while Martins, a rough diamond, would benefit from a Euro experience. There is a question mark over goalkeeper Eduardo, once rated as one of Europe's best. After a poor spell in Italy his standing has dropped and he has had to play back-up at Benfica. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP H

03.09.10	Cyprus (h)	4-4
07.09.10	Norway (a)	0-1
08.10.10	Denmark (h)	3-1
12.10.10	Iceland (a)	3-1
04.06.11	Norway (h)	1-0
02.09.11	Cyprus (a)	4-0
07.10.11	Iceland (h)	5-3
11.10.11	Denmark (a)	1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	8	6	1	1	15	6	19
Portugal	8	5	1	2	21	12	16
Norway	8	5	1	2	10	7	16
Iceland	8	1	1	6	6	14	4
Cyprus	8	0	2	6	7	20	2

Play-offs

11.11.11	Bosnia-Herzegovina (a)	0-0
15.11.11	Bosnia-Herzegovina (h)	6-2

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Poland (a)	0-0
26.05.12	Macedonia (h)	
02.06.12	Turkey (h)	

BASE CAMP



Paulo Bento

“We can’t expect Ronaldo to solve all of our problems, that wouldn’t be fair. We must beat other teams as a team, not counting on just one or two individuals”

You took over when the national team were struggling to qualify. What wasn’t working and what did you try to change right away?

I can’t really talk about what happened before I got there. What I can say is that I took over after Portugal had drawn with Cyprus and lost to Norway, so we had no margin for error. My first game in charge was a crucial battle with Denmark. We knew it was a case of do or die, but we also knew we had the quality and skill necessary to get back on the right track and qualify for Euro 2012. We proved that by winning that game and playing good football. It was a step in the right direction. I have to praise our players because they were fantastic in the way they adapted to my coaching team’s style right away.

Portugal have now failed to qualify automatically for the past two tournaments and have had to rely on the play-offs. Why is that?

Look, a qualifying campaign takes place over the period of a year and a half, so there are moments where a team cannot be at its best and one or two poor results can mean you miss out on automatic qualification. During this last qualifying phase we drew and lost our first two games so that made it harder. However, we only lost points again in our final game against Denmark, a team that had also finished ahead of us in qualifying for the World Cup. We can’t underestimate a nation like Denmark that has played in seven Euros and four World Cups.

How tough is it to manage so many big egos and famous players?

The players who are picked to represent the national team do so with great pride. They are all extremely professional. Each player obviously has his own personality and one must respect that. What is important is to make everyone feel like they are part of one group.

What is Cristiano Ronaldo like?

He is extremely professional and he is also a great guy. I worked with him while I was still playing and he always showed great determination to be the best player in the world. He is a very easy person to get along with. He is very well mannered, he likes to learn and he knows what he wants.



Respect... Bento wants his players to put the team first

COACH'S RECORD



Bento has the third-highest win percentage of any Portugal coach, behind Manuel Da Luz Afonso (75%) and Humberto Coelho (67%).



P	W	D	L
14	9	3	2

He has been criticised for being selfish when he plays for Portugal and not as good as when he plays for Real Madrid. How are you going to get the best out of him?

Cristiano Ronaldo always gives 100 per cent when he plays for the national team, just like every other player. I don't think anyone can say he is not dedicated to the cause. In the national team we have less time to work with the players so it's normal that their styles and performances can sometimes differ. Cristiano was our top scorer in qualifying. Some people always want more from him, but as far as I am concerned he has always been an exemplary professional and has always played well with the national team. Now we can't expect Cristiano to solve all of our problems, that wouldn't be fair. We must beat other teams as a team, not counting on just one or two individuals.

Why is there such a shortage of world-class strikers in Portugal?

We score a lot of goals regardless of the characteristics of our striker. Only three teams scored more goals than Portugal in qualifying. Pauleta was the all-time top scorer in the history of the national team, have you forgotten about him? Hugo Almeida and Helder Postiga have lived up to my expectations. If the team score plenty of goals, it really doesn't matter who gets them as long as we win and our attacking plan works. We have a lot of attacking options and I am confident that our strikers are good enough to make an impact at the Euros. As far as who will start up front, I still have some time to decide.

After reaching the Euro 2004 Final and the semis of the World Cup, Portugal had lower performances in 2008 and 2010. What are your expectations for Euro 2012?

Every team who makes the final phase of a tournament can dream of winning the title. The Euro is a very tough competition with a lot of teams at a similar level. As far as the last two major tournaments are concerned, I believe nothing really went wrong. In 2008 we lost to Germany, who made the Final, while in 2010 we were knocked out by Spain, who went on to lift the trophy. So they were solid performances. We will prepare for Euro 2012 in the best way possible and our first objective is to make the quarter-finals. I believe we can get that far even if our group is incredibly difficult.

Interview by Pedro Pinto



Forward thinking...Nani believes anything can happen if Portugal get through the group phase

Nani

“Spain have developed into a superpower over the last few years, but past results do not guarantee success in this tournament”

Are Portugal one of the title contenders this summer?

It really depends on what happens in the group phase. We are in the toughest group so our primary objective is getting out of it. If we do that, then I think we have to be considered one of the favourites to win it all.

You are in a very difficult group. Who do you expect to go through?

If you take a look at what has happened in the past, then you have to say Germany and Holland are the favourites because they have a great pedigree in this competition. However, you never know what can happen, so Portugal and Denmark also harbour hopes of advancing to the next phase. It will depend a lot on what happens in the first and second matches in our group.

Are Spain favourites to win it?

Well, they are the defending champions so they have to be seen as favourites. It is true Spain have developed into a superpower over the last few years, but their past results do not guarantee them success in this tournament. To be honest, when I watched them in qualifying I didn't think they were as strong as they have been previously.

Why do you think Portugal struggled so much during the early

stages of the qualifying campaign?

I really don't want to get into it, but I think there were a lot of issues around the team and I believe they affected the performances of the players.

How important is Cristiano Ronaldo to the national team, both on and off the pitch?

He is turning into a leader. He is acquiring a lot of experience as captain and learning how to deal with the responsibility that comes with that. The Portuguese people have always expected a lot from him, and since he is the captain they now expect even more. He can handle it, though. He is a fantastic professional who motivates everyone around him.

Do you think he is the best Portuguese player of all time?

I think he is proving that. Numbers don't lie and they show he is simply phenomenal. To do what he has done – and continues to do, day in and day out – is incredible. Yes, I think he is on his way to becoming the best Portuguese player of all time.

Why is there a shortage of world-class strikers in Portugal?

I think it is very common in Portugal to find technical players, creative players, and not so much players who are pure

target men. If it is a cultural or genetic thing, I really don't know. What you have to see is that Portuguese people really aren't that tall so it is tough to find big and strong strikers. Our kids grow up learning how to dribble, how to run with the ball, how to have the ball at their feet. They rarely play with their back to goal. That's why I think there aren't so many strikers in Portugal.

You, Ronaldo, Patricio, Veloso and Moutinho all came through Sporting Lisbon's academy. What's the secret of their success?

The Sporting academy has always been able to produce more quality players than others. It has a very good scouting department and the people there know how to nourish and protect the young players while they are developing. The coaches also encourage the youngsters to do well in their studies, so all the conditions are there for kids to succeed.

Pepe has a reputation of being quite an aggressive player. Do you agree, and are you worried that his conduct could be hazardous for Portugal?

I don't agree. I have known Pepe for a long time and it is stupid to say he is an aggressive or a dirty player. What happens is that there is a lot of pressure at Real Madrid so at times he can be affected by that. But he is not the only one. Of course he will be at his best at the Euro... otherwise [smiling] I have to put him in line!

Interview by Pedro Pinto

THE VIEW FROM PORTUGAL



“I don't know if I am going to have a chance to watch any live games at the Euros, but I really hope Portugal can dignify its name in this competition. The first objective has to be making it out of the group phase. Then anything can happen”

Luis Figo, Portugal's most-capped player



“Paulo Bento has said he wants to reach the quarter-finals and, of course, no one can win the tournament without first thinking about getting out of their group. What I hope is that we can go as far as possible. We have great players, a quality team, so why not aim high?”

Joao Vieira Pinto, ex-national striker



“Portugal are the only team in their group who have not been European champions. If they get through they will have a great chance to reach the semi-finals or even the Final. The Portuguese public want to know if Cristiano Ronaldo is, finally, going to perform for the national side. Up to now, he has been more of an individual than a team player”

Vitor Serpa, chief editor A Bola

GOALKEEPERS



1
0

BETO

Age 30 (01.05.82)
CFR Cluj (Rom)
QR: 0 games
Had to leave Porto to get regular first-team action and the move to Romania has paid off. Has shown flashes of the form which initially thrust him into the limelight with Leixões a handful of seasons ago.



10
0

Rui PATRÍCIO

Age 24 (15.02.88)
Sporting Lisbon
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Talented and tenacious, he has become first choice for Portugal after his best-ever season with Sporting. Given his big break at club level by the current national coach, Bento.



32
0

QUIM

Age 36 (13.11.75)
Sporting Braga
QR: 0 games
Back after a serious knee injury to help Braga in another impressive league campaign. Won the league with Benfica in 2010 and has always defied critics who say he is too short.

COACH

Paulo BENTO

Age 42 (20.06.69)
Portugal coach since September 2010

A combative defensive midfielder in his playing days, he carried that spirit into management with Sporting Lisbon, who he took to the knockout stages of the Champions League for the first time in 2008-09. Took over the reigns from Carlos Queiroz with Portugal on the ropes in the Euro 2012 qualifying campaign but quickly turned things around. Won 35 caps for Portugal as a player and had a four-season spell in Spain playing for Oviedo.



DEFENDERS



48
5

Bruno ALVES

Age 30 (27.11.81)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
QR: 8 games/0 goals
One of the most expensive left-backs ever, joining Real Madrid from Benfica for £25m in the summer of 2010. Once compared to Arjen Robben but it was as a defender that he excelled.



20
1

Fabio COENTRÃO

Age 24 (11.03.88)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 7 games/0 goals
A veteran of two World Cups but has always played second fiddle to Portugal's more established centre-backs. Has won league titles in Portugal with Porto and Germany with Wolfsburg.



10
0

Ricardo COSTA

Age 30 (16.05.81)
Valencia (Spa)
QR: 0 games
A veteran of two World Cups but has always played second fiddle to Portugal's more established centre-backs. Has won league titles in Portugal with Porto and Germany with Wolfsburg.



3
0

NELSON

Age 28 (10.06.83)
Real Betis (Spa)
QR: 0 games
Recently returned to the national set-up following an 11-month hiatus. Quick and versatile attacking right-back who was born in Cape Verde and only obtained Portuguese citizenship in 2005.



38
2

PEPE

Age 29 (26.02.83)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Hard-tackling central defender whose uncompromising style often gets him in trouble with referees and opponents. Elegant when he has the ball, but often aggressive without it.

MIDFIELDERS



9
2

Manuel FERNANDES

Age 26 (05.02.86)
Besiktas (Tur)
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Once compared to Claude Makelele, he has blossomed into a versatile midfielder. Has shown flashes of brilliance in Portugal, England, Spain and Turkey, but is still too inconsistent.



14
2

Carlos MARTINS

Age 30 (29.04.82)
Granada (Spa)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Has plenty of skill but has failed to settle at any of his clubs due to a fiery temperament. Has endured a nightmare season off the pitch after his son was diagnosed with leukaemia.



54
8

Raul MEIRELES

Age 29 (17.03.83)
Chelsea (Eng)
QR: 10 games/2 goals
Can play anywhere in the centre of the park. Won three straight league titles at Porto before moving to England. A hard-working player who can also score spectacular goals from distance.



7
2

Ruben MICHAEL

Age 25 (19.08.86)
Real Zaragoza (Spa)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Scored twice on his international debut, against Finland, but has since failed to hit the back of the net. Like Ronaldo, he was born in Madeira.



40
2

Joao MOUTINHO

Age 25 (08.09.86)
Porto
QR: 9 games/1 goal
Revered at Sporting but left after being called a "rotten apple" by the club president. His move to Porto in 2010 was the most expensive between two Portuguese clubs.

FORWARDS



40
15

Hugo ALMEIDA

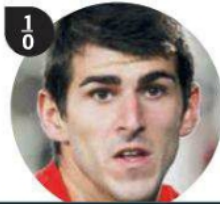
Age 27 (23.05.84)
Besiktas (Tur)
QR: 6 games/2 goals
Tall, strong centre-forward who never really blossomed at Porto, but has posted good goalscoring figures in Germany (four seasons at Werder Bremen) and Turkey (this season with Besiktas).



52
12

NANI

Age 25 (17.11.86)
Manchester United (Eng)
QR: 10 games/5 goals
Forms a potent force with Ronaldo on the flanks. Possesses elegant skills and is known to go on dazzling runs. Once criticised for being too selfish, he has blossomed into one of Portugal's best players.



1
0

Nelson OLIVEIRA

Age 20 (08.08.91)
Benfica
QR: 0 games
Key player at the last Under-20 World Cup where Portugal were runners-up. Scored on his Champions League debut against Zenit and made international debut against Poland in February.



47
19

Helder POSTIGA

Age 29 (02.09.82)
Real Zaragoza (Spa)
QR: 8 games/5 goals
Curiously has a better strike rate with his country than any of his clubs. His knack for scoring important goals includes a dramatic equaliser against England in the quarter-finals of Euro 2004.



33
3

Ricardo QUARESMA

Age 28 (26.09.83)
Besiktas (Tur)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Skilful player who has rarely fulfilled his potential, and a questionable work ethic and team spirit have cost him dearly. Big moves to Barcelona, Internazionale and Chelsea all failed to pay off.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Pressure is on Ronaldo and Nani to create and finish

Portugal play in a 4-3-3 formation with inverted triangles in midfield and attack. While Veloso sits in front of defence, behind Moutinho and Meireles in the centre of the park, Postiga leads a three-pronged attack with Nani and Ronaldo on the wings.

There are questions that Bento will have to answer before the tournament starts in June; for example, will Veloso hold on to his place as defensive midfielder or will Meireles be used there, opening up another slot further up the



Joao PEREIRA

Age 28 (25.02.84)
Sporting Lisbon
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Small and feisty terrier-like right-back succeeded Paulo Ferreira and Miguel in a position where Portugal have always possessed great quality. Started out at Benfica as a winger.



ROLANDO

Age 26 (31.08.85)
Porto
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Born in Cape Verde, he moved to Portugal as a child and joined Campomaiorense's youth ranks. Rose to prominence at Belenenses before earning a big-money move to Porto. Struggled this season.



SILVIO

Age 24 (28.09.87)
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Solid full-back whose debut season in Spain was marred by injuries. Before moving to Atletico, he was a key member of the Sporting Braga side that reached the Europa League Final in 2011.

field? Another issue concerns the central striker's place. Postiga has a great record for Portugal but has endured an inconsistent season with Zaragoza and could be replaced by either Almeida or Oliveira.

Portugal's style has always been to play the ball to feet and rely on the speed of the wingers to create goalscoring opportunities around the box. With no classic no10 pulling the strings, Ronaldo and Nani have to take the responsibility of being playmakers and finishers. If there is one clear weakness in the Portuguese team it is the lack of an experienced attacking midfielder in the mould of Rui Costa or Deco to dictate play. Since they retired, no one has taken up the baton.

Pedro Pinto



Miguel VELOSO

Age 25 (11.05.86)
Genoa (Ita)
QR: 6 games/1 goal
Accused of being lazy at the start of his career at Sporting, he has become a consummate professional in Italy. In and out of the national set-up, but passing and tactical nous could earn him a place.



Cristiano RONALDO

Age 27 (05.02.85)
Real Madrid (Spa)
QR: 8 games/7 goals
The planet's most expensive player has shattered Real Madrid's single-season scoring records. Dangerous from anywhere within 40 yards.



Inspirational...Ronaldo

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER EDUARDO

Age 29 (19.09.82)
Genoa (Ita)
Caps 27 (0 goals)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
First choice at the 2010 World Cup but has since dropped down the pecking order. Loaned to Benfica this season but did not play much.

DEFENDERS ELISEU

Age 28 (01.10.83)
Malaga (Spa)
Caps 4 (1 goal)
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Left-back who can also used as a winger.

Paulo JORGE

Age 31 (16.06.80)
APOEL Nicosia (Cyp)
Caps 0
Central defender who joined APOEL from his hometown club, Sporting Braga, in 2009.

MIDFIELDERS DUDA

Age 31 (27.06.80)
Malaga (Spa)
Caps 18 (1 goal)
QR: 0 games
Left-winger who has played in Spain for all of his professional career. Played two games at the 2010 World Cup finals.

Andre MARTINS

Age 22 (21.01.90)
Sporting Lisbon
Caps 0
Central midfielder who made his Sporting debut in this season's Europa League.

Hugo VIANA

Age 29 (15.01.83)
Sporting Braga
Caps 25 (1 goal)
QR: 0 games
Played in the 2004 Olympics and the 2006 World Cup.

We're almost there...Stephen Ward celebrates giving Ireland the lead in their play-off second leg against Estonia



Trapattoni could do with another slice of luck



It is 24 years since the Republic took their place on the European stage for the first time when they went to the 1988 finals in Germany. That qualification was achieved with a foreign manager, Jack Charlton, and a little help from a striker from another country, with Scotland's Gary Mackay scoring the winning goal against Bulgaria in Sofia that ensured Ireland's passage.

There are similarities this time round, with another foreign manager, Giovanni Trapattoni, in charge. And they also got a helping hand from an overseas forward when former Poland international Zbigniew Boniek, who played for Trapattoni at Juventus, drew Ireland against Estonia, the weakest team in the play-offs.

Trapattoni may have been unfortunate to lose out on a place in the 2010 World Cup after the infamous Thierry Henry handball in Paris, but overall he has had luck on his side. And although he has been criticised for being conservative by some sections of the Irish media, there is no doubt that he has used all his experience to build a team that is not only hard to beat but one that can also play attractive football if allowed.

While Charlton inherited a talented squad when he took over in 1986, Trapattoni has worked wonders with few real stars, apart from record goalscorer Robbie Keane.

The Irish have always been difficult to beat in Dublin and that tradition has continued under Trapattoni. But Russia caused a surprise when they raced into a 3-0 lead in the qualifiers. A change of tactics by the manager saw the Irish pull two goals back, but defeat had supporters

A map of Poland and Ukraine. In Poland, Gdansk is marked with a dot. A curved arrow points from Gdansk to Poznan, with '150 miles' written next to it. Poznan is marked with a dot and labeled '2 games'. Warsaw is marked with a dot and labeled '1 game, 8 miles, Sopot to stadium'. A scale box in the top left corner shows '150 miles' and '100 mi'. Ukraine is shown to the east, with Kiev marked with a dot. The map is divided into two colored regions: a light purple region in the north and a light grey region in the south.

questioning if they could make it to the finals.

Another setback came in the draw with Slovakia in Dublin last September, but four days later the Irish held out for an unbelievable point in Moscow. Richard Dunne was magnificent that night, as was goalkeeper Shay Given. The same night Slovakia's chances evaporated when they lost 4-0 at home to Armenia. Victory over Andorra and Armenia then secured the runners-up spot and a place in the play-offs.

Victory over Estonia in the first leg in Tallinn had Irish fans already planning their summer holidays, but Trapattoni wouldn't admit that the "cat was in the sack" until after the second leg in Dublin which ended 1-1.

Loyal Trapattoni

Trapattoni is loyal to his players and has maintained all along he will stand by those who featured in the 12 qualifying games. That is bad news for rising stars such as James McClean of Sunderland and Everton's Shane Duffy. McClean made a brief appearance against the Czech Republic in February, but Trapattoni has hinted that the player, who has been in great form for his club this season, may have to wait until the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.

Trapattoni used 26 players in the qualifying games and two of them were goalkeepers, Given and Kieren Westwood. David Forde is likely to be the third-choice. Kevin Kilbane is injured, and if the manager does stand by the players who took part in the qualifiers Liam Lawrence, Andy Keogh and James McCarthy are likely to be the ones who miss out – which is especially tough on McCarthy, who has

10.06.12	Croatia (Poznan, Pol)
14.06.12	Spain (Gdansk, Pol)
18.06.12	Italy (Poznan, Pol)

opted to play for the Republic rather than his native Scotland.

Irish fans, who will be attending their first major tournament since the 2002 World Cup, are happy that travel-wise they are based in Poland. And with the country going through a tough time economically, qualification has definitely helped to lift the mood of the nation.

Group C is a tough one and playing for three draws might not be enough to get through to the knockout stage. It looks as though Trapattoni's side may have to win one game if they hope to progress. **WS**

Year	Group Stage	Quarter-Finalists	Semi-Finalists	Runners-Up	Winners
1960	1	0	0	0	0
1964	1	0	0	0	0
1968	1	0	0	0	0
1972	1	0	0	0	0
1976	1	0	0	0	0
1980	1	0	0	0	0
1984	1	0	0	0	0
1988	1	0	0	0	0
1992	1	0	0	0	0
1996	1	0	0	0	0
2000	1	0	0	0	0
2004	1	0	0	0	0
2008	1	0	0	0	0

GROUP B

03.09.10	Armenia (a)	1-0
07.09.10	Andorra (h)	3-1
08.10.10	Russia (h)	2-3
12.10.10	Slovakia (a)	1-1
26.03.11	Macedonia (h)	2-1
04.06.11	Macedonia (a)	2-0
02.09.11	Slovakia (h)	0-0
06.09.11	Russia (a)	0-0
07.10.11	Andorra (a)	2-0
11.10.11	Armenia (h)	2-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Russia	10	7	2	1	17	4	23
Rep Ireland	10	6	3	1	15	7	21
Armenia	10	5	2	3	22	10	17
Slovakia	10	4	3	3	7	10	15
Macedonia	10	2	2	6	8	14	8
Andorra	10	0	0	10	1	25	0

PLAY-OFFS

11.11.11	Estonia (a)	4-0
15.11.11	Estonia (h)	1-1

29.02.12	Czech Republic (h)	1-1
26.05.12	Bosnia (h)	
04.06.12	Hungary (a)	

Giovanni Trapattoni

“All 11 players must attack and defend together, without necessarily expecting to play well. That way you form a winning mentality”

How far can Ireland go? Many critics would say your team will be eliminated from a group that includes Spain and Italy...

Everything is possible, even getting out of the first round. We've got to believe in ourselves. We have the right mentality and enthusiasm. I'm always telling people, when you get close to Ireland you can smell the team spirit. Obviously, Spain seem unbeatable at the moment, this really is a David versus Goliath match, we're up against a giant here. However, one of my favourite sayings is "mai dire mai" – never say never.

What are the major qualities you have brought to Ireland?

I have given them balance, an equilibrium, and I have underlined that all 11 players attack and defend, without necessarily expecting to play well. That way you form a winning mentality. Did you ever wonder why certain strikers no longer form part of the squad set-up? Because they would lose the ball and then stand around and watch. But you've got to chase back.

How are you personally preparing for Euro 2012?

As of now, I spend all my time watching DVDs of Spain, Croatia and Italy, looking at the tactical approach and what I can do. I have seen all of the games – home and away – of the teams we will play. Every little detail – free-kicks, corner kicks, throw-ins, how they start the game – is important for us and will be important in the games in June. I have to make sure that the team is 100 per cent prepared for every little detail. I cannot think after the game: "I didn't know they would do this." I need to know everything about their players and their team.

How big a worry is it that some of your players regularly end up on the bench at their club sides?

I'm only worried about injuries, I'm not worried if two or three players do not play for their clubs. Once they join us in May, after three or four days they will be fine and they will be ready. It is better that they are not tired and that they are fresh. I am not worried if they miss three or four games, it's not a problem for us. We have a week to

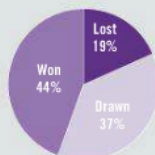


Passion... Trapattoni urges his side on during the play-off first leg against Estonia in Tallinn

COACH'S RECORD



Trapattoni has led the Republic of Ireland in games against his home nation, Italy, on three occasions – winning once and drawing twice.



P	W	D	L
43	19	16	8

prepare in Dublin, and then time in Italy and Hungary.

One of your key defenders, Richard Dunne, could miss the finals because of a shoulder injury...

Obviously we have to wait and see, but I am optimistic about Dunne. I understand that the recovery from his operation is going well.

You are under a lot of pressure to name younger players such as James McLean of Sunderland, James McCarthy of Wigan Athletic and Seamus Coleman of Everton in your squad. What will your criterion be?

We have 27 or 28 players and it will be

a great pity, a great pity, when we have to decide on the 23 because of the players who have to miss out. The squad is very important to me and they all deserve to be at the finals, they helped us achieve qualification, but I have to decide which of them deserve to come with us. I have two or three decisions to make and it's never easy. McCarthy, Coleman, players like that, I will certainly not forget them for the next campaign, for the World Cup, but at the moment I must know what is best for this tournament. I have said that it is important to give a chance to the players who helped us achieve qualification, but it is also important to leave one or two spaces for the new group, the next generation.

How will Ireland fare at Euro 2012?

I go back to what I said about having to play guys who spend a lot of time on the bench at their club. I have learned to trust these guys, to trust in their immense pride. Add to that the fact many of them are excellent players, then add on good organisation and the Irish mentality, and you can go a long way. Indeed, we have come a long way in the last four years.

Interview by Sean Creedon/Fabio Licari (Gazzetta dello Sport)



Congratulations...Keane salutes the fans in Dublin after the Republic seal their place in Euro 2012

Robbie Keane

“I genuinely believe we have the best fans in the world. They will help us be a force to be reckoned with”

How do you rate your group opponents?

We have obviously been drawn in a tough group, there is no denying that. Spain, as current world champions will be a big challenge to overcome. I also have a lot of respect for Croatia and Italy. I have played with Croatian players [Luka] Modric and [Vedran] Corluka at Spurs, so I'm fully aware of the quality they possess. And of course the Italians will undoubtedly be as strong as they are in every tournament.

What's a realistic target? What would be a successful tournament?

I genuinely think that anything is possible when it comes to this tournament. Ireland has a tradition of performing well against big teams in the past. We beat England at Euro 88, Italy at USA 94 and drew with Germany at the 2002 World Cup. We have nothing to fear going into this tournament and we are well aware of our capabilities.

Do you relish being underdogs?

I don't think we are underdogs. We have got to the tournament in the same way as everyone else. We kept eight consecutive clean sheets last year, which is a big achievement in itself. But we also played two of our group opponents, Italy and Croatia, beating Italy 2-0 in Liege and then drawing with Croatia in Dublin. People may not have

as high expectations for us as they would for our opponents, but I don't think we should be underestimated.

What impact has Trapattoni had on the squad?

We all have a lot to thank him for. He has brought so much experience and knowledge to the team. He is a pleasure to work with and I genuinely have so much respect for him. He is one of football's true legends and his track record speaks for itself.

What do you remember of Euro 88?

I was just coming up to my eighth birthday and remember the neighbourhood, in fact the whole country, going football crazy. I have so many great memories of that tournament. One that sticks out in particular is Ray Houghton's goal against England in Stuttgart. What a day that was to be Irish. That tournament definitely made me want to be a footballer. Hopefully that buzz will come back this summer and we can inspire today's children in the same way.

How important are Ireland's fans?

I genuinely believe we have the best fans in the world. I know there will be a serious fan base travelling to Poland, with estimates of up to 20,000 going out to support us. It has been 10 years since we qualified for a major

tournament and it will be great to have the fans there cheering us on. The support from around the country really gives us a boost. They will help us be a force to be reckoned with this summer.

How was your stay at Aston Villa?

I really enjoyed it as there was a huge Irish contingent there and I was made to feel really welcome by everybody. It was great playing every week and no doubt it helped to keep my fitness at a high level. LA Galaxy were going to different places for pre-season work, but I think it was more beneficial for me to be in one place rather than travelling around.

Is it a help or hindrance playing through the summer in MLS?

Obviously adapting to playing during the summer with Galaxy will be tough, especially with the European finals right in the middle of the season. I'm adapting to the climate in the US pretty well though. There was a lot of talk about me being homesick, but I don't know where that came from. I have scored over 100 goals in the Premier League but I am really enjoying my time at Galaxy now. I want to play every week and I'm never happy sitting on the bench.

Interview by Sean Creedon

THE VIEW FROM IRELAND



“I think we will draw with Croatia and probably lose to Spain, but I would be confident we can beat Italy in the last game in the group. We have played them three times since Trapattoni took over, winning once and drawing twice. [Cesare] Prandelli

is not very consistent and he used over 40 players in the qualifiers. Also he could be without both his main strikers [Giuseppe] Rossi and [Antonio] Cassano in the finals”

Brian Kerr, former Republic of Ireland and Faroe Islands manager

“Ireland need to win their opening game against Croatia if we are to have any realistic chance of progressing. We have become much harder to beat under Trapattoni, but we still struggle to beat good teams. Spain will be very tough and my concern is that Italy will almost certainly need to beat us to be sure of going through. With Italy you are never sure which team will show up, but I think a repeat of their woeful 2010 World Cup performance is maybe a bit too much to hope for”

Emmet Malone, football writer for the Irish Times



“I think Trapattoni and most Irish people feel we can beat Italy. Remember we beat them at USA 94. Spain will possibly outplay us but they don't score many. They looked great against England at Wembley but England won and I think we could get a

draw. Croatia will probably be the most difficult of all. They have great players and a very good manager and I worry about that one. But five points could get us out of the group”

Jimmy Magee, TV commentator who has covered 12 World Cup finals for RTE

GOALKEEPERS



David FORDE

Age 32 (20.10.79)
Millwall (Eng)
QR: 0 games
A latecomer to international football, he was 31 when he made his debut. Began in Ireland with his native Galway and also played for Derry City plus various English and Welsh clubs.



Shay GIVEN

Age 36 (20.04.76)
Aston Villa (Eng)
QR: 11 games/0 goals
A youth-team player with Celtic who established himself at Newcastle before moving on to Man City and now Villa. A great shot stopper, he is the Republic's most-capped player of all time.



Keiren WESTWOOD

Age 27 (23.10.84)
Sunderland (Eng)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Born in England, he qualifies through his Wexford-born grandparents. Rejected by Manchester United, he was on Man City's books for two years. Thought about becoming a policeman.

COACH

Giovanni TRAPATTONI (Ita)

Age 73 (17.03.39)
Republic of Ireland coach since February 2008

Born on St Patrick's Day, he is the most successful coach in the history of Italian football and has also won league titles in Austria, Germany and Portugal. One of only two coaches to have won all three European major club titles, along with Udo Lattek. Won 17 caps for Italy as a player and appeared for his country in the 1962 World Cup finals. Has agreed to stay on with the Irish for the 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign.



DEFENDERS



Richard DUNNE

Age 32 (21.09.79)
Aston Villa (Eng)
QR: 10 games/1 goal
Has scored more own goals in the Premier League than any other player. Fractured his right shoulder against his former club, Manchester City, in February, prompting concern that he may miss out on Euro 2012.



Kevin FOLEY

Age 27 (01.11.84)
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Luton-born right-back who qualifies to play for the Republic via his Kerry-born parents. He joined Wolves from Luton Town in 2007 and made his Ireland debut against Nigeria in May 2009.



Stephen KELLY

Age 28 (06.09.83)
Fulham (Eng)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Can play anywhere across the back four. With Birmingham City in the 2007-08 season, he was the only outfield player in the Premier League to play every minute of every game.



Darren O'DEA

Age 26 (04.02.86)
Celtic (Sco)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Played in the Champions League for Celtic and spent this season on loan at Leeds United. Made his senior debut in a friendly against South Africa at Limerick's Thomond Park in 2009.



John O'SHEA

Age 31 (30.04.81)
Sunderland (Eng)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Won all the game's major honours while at Manchester United. His only international goal came in a friendly against Australia in 2003. Can play in all positions across the back line.

MIDFIELDERS



Keith ANDREWS

Age 31 (13.09.80)
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
QR: 7 games/1 goal
Scored on his debut against Poland in November 2008 and now fills the holding midfield role. Captained previous clubs Wolverhampton Wanderers and MK Dons.



Damien DUFF

Age 33 (02.03.79)
Fulham (Eng)
QR: 7 games/0 goals
Won Premier League titles with Chelsea and also played for Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United. Can play on either wing. Famed for his ability to sleep for extended periods.



Keith FAHEY

Age 29 (15.01.83)
Birmingham City (Eng)
QR: 8 games/1 goal
Failed to settle when a trainee at Arsenal and Aston Villa, "Fats" returned to Dublin and his performances with St Patrick's Athletic got another chance in England, with Birmingham.



Darron GIBSON

Age 24 (25.10.87)
Everton (Eng)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
From Derry in Northern Ireland, he opted to play for the Republic, who he first represented at under-17 level. Left Manchester United to get first-team football this season.



Paul GREEN

Age 29 (10.04.83)
Derby County (Eng)
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Another who qualifies thanks to an Irish grandfather. First capped against Paraguay in May 2010, he was recalled to the squad for the friendly against the Czech Republic in February. A tough tackler.

FORWARDS



Simon COX

Age 25 (28.04.87)
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Scored on his debut against Northern Ireland in May 2011. Started out at hometown club Reading. Has also played for Brentford, Northampton Town and Swindon Town.



Kevin DOYLE

Age 28 (18.09.83)
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
QR: 9 games/2 goals
Played for St Patrick's Athletic and Cork City in the League of Ireland before joining Reading. The last Irish player to be sent off – against Armenia in Dublin last October.



Robbie KEANE

Age 31 (08.07.80)
Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
QR: 11 games/7 goals
The Dubliner has set an Irish scoring record that could last for decades. Captain since 2006, penalty-taker and always one of the first players asked to sing at after-match parties.



Shane LONG

Age 25 (22.01.87)
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Played under-18 hurling with his native Tipperary before concentrating on football. Played guitar on the recording of the squad's official song *Rocky Road to Poland*.



Jon WALTERS

Age 28 (20.09.83)
Stoke City (Eng)
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Old-fashioned centre-forward who can also play on the right wing. From Birkenhead, he qualifies through his Dublin-born mother. Stoke are his 11th club.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Settled side with plenty of options up front for Trapattoni

Trapattoni has persisted with a 4-4-2 formation, which has led to some criticism that he employs conservative and inflexible tactics. But it has got Ireland this far and no doubt he will continue with this style.

The side is very settled at the back, where the versatile Kelly can fill in on either flank at full-back if required. O'Dea is the obvious cover for central defenders Dunne or St Ledger.

In midfield Gibson is the main back-up



Sean ST LEDGER

Age 27 (28.12.84)
Leicester City (Eng)
QR: 9 games/1 goal
Born in Birmingham, he qualifies through his Carlow-born grandfather. First came to Irish fans' notice when featured in a Sky TV programme where Ron Atkinson helped Peterborough United.



Stephen WARD

Age 26 (20.08.85)
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Now captain of Wolves who he joined from Bohemians in 2007. Scored on his senior debut against Northern Ireland in May 2011. Right-footed but comfortable at left-back.



Stephen HUNT

Age 30 (01.08.81)
Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng)
QR: 7 games/0 goals
Has won 22 of his 38 caps from the bench. Scored his only goal against Poland in November 2008, the same game in which his brother Noel made his debut.



Aiden MCGEADY

Age 26 (04.04.86)
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
QR: 12 games/2 goals
Old fashioned outside-right who Trapattoni often plays on the left. Born in Scotland but qualifies through his Donegal-born grandparents. The first Irish international to play in Russia.



Glenn WHELAN

Age 28 (13.01.84)
Stoke City (Eng)
QR: 12 games/0 goals
Played for Manchester City and Sheffield Wednesday before moving to Stoke. A combative midfielder, he has missed only six of Trapattoni's 43 games.

for Whelan and Andrews, while Fahey is more of a creative player.

Trapattoni seems to have most options up front and has recently said he would consider playing captain Keane just in behind the lone striker in a role made popular by Italy's Totti. Keane's normal striking partner is Doyle, but he is struggling at club level so Trapattoni may opt for Long instead. Walters has done well since coming on the international scene last year and he is a good target man, while Cox has scored three times in the past year.

Sean Creedon



Versatile... Kelly

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

Stephen HENDERSON

Age 28 (16.09.83)
West Ham United (Eng)
Caps 0
Was called up to the squad for the game in February against the Czech Republic.

DEFENDERS

Ciaran CLARK

Age 22 (26.09.89)
Aston Villa (Eng)
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Captained England at under-19 and under-20 level before discovering his Irish roots.

Shane DUFFY

Age 20 (01.01.92)
Everton (Eng)
Caps 0
Born in Northern Ireland but has opted to play for the Republic.

Paul McSHANE

Age 26 (06.01.86)
Hull City (Eng)
Caps 26 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Joined Crystal Palace on loan in January.

MIDFIELDERS

Seamus COLEMAN

Age 23 (11.10.88)
Everton (Eng)
Caps 4 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
A right-back at Everton, used as a right-sided midfielder by Trapattoni.

Wes HOOLAHAN

Age 29 (20.05.82)
Norwich City (Eng)
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Won his only cap against Colombia in what was Trapattoni's second game in charge.

James MCCARTHY

Age 21 (12.11.90)
Wigan Athletic (Eng)
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Born in Scotland of Irish parents.

James McCLEAN

Age 23 (22.04.89)
Sunderland (Eng)
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Has been a revelation with Sunderland since Martin O'Neill took over.

FORWARDS

Andy KEOGH

Age 25 (16.05.86)
Millwall (Eng)
Caps 22 (1 goal)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Scored in Trapattoni's first-ever game but has not found the net since.

Liam LAWRENCE

Age 30 (14.12.81)
Portsmouth (Eng)
Caps 15 (2 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Joined Cardiff City on loan due to Portsmouth's financial problems.

Inspiration...skipper Arshavin will meet Sokratis Papastathopoulos* Greece again in the last group game



RUSSIA 2008 revisited?

Advocaat's men have been lifted by a strong qualifying run



VICTOR GUSEV
in Moscow

Having topped a major tournament qualification group for the first time in five attempts, hopes are high for the Euro 2008 semi-finalists this summer.

After replacing Dutch coach Guus Hiddink following the team's failure to reach the 2010 World Cup finals, Dick Advocaat persevered with the bulk of his predecessor's line-up. And although they suffered a surprise loss at home to Slovakia early in the campaign, Russia soon regained control of their own destiny in their group by winning away to the Republic of Ireland. A revenge victory in Slovakia and a last-day thumping of Andorra eventually saw them top the group.

After being drawn with Poland, Czech Republic and Greece, anything short of reaching the quarter-finals would be considered a major disappointment for Advocaat's squad.

Russian fans are dreaming of a repeat of the 2008 run, but to do so Advocaat will be keeping his fingers crossed that first-choice goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev is fully recovered from injury. Although the defence is often criticised as the weak link, Russia conceded only four goals in 10 qualifying games, with Akinfeev the saviour in some crucial moments during the most important matches.

If he fails to make the opening game, the goalkeeper's jersey will go to Vyacheslav Malafeev, who kept four clean sheets in his four qualifying appearances.

In front of Akinfeev or Malafeev, a lack of competition for the centre-back positions leaves the CSKA Moscow duo of Sergei Ignashevich and Vasili Berezutsky with almost

no rivals. Although both are experienced and good in the air, they may, however, have problems if confronted by quick forwards.

There are a number of options in midfield and most of them are Zenit players who Advocaat knows well from his time with the club. While Igor Denisov effectively controls the back, Roman Shirokov is the side's creative force. The Zenit midfield has recently been enhanced by the introduction of CSKA's Alan Dzagoev, but the 21-year-old is struggling to be fit in time for the tournament. A broken toe will leave him short of match action until mid May. By that time the league will have finished, leaving Dzagoev with no competitive practice.

Doubts over Arshavin

While some critics doubt Andrei Arshavin's right to be captain – and even his place in the final 23 – they should remember what happened when he was suspended for the first two games of Euro 2008.

Immediately restored to the team by Hiddink, he inspired the team to get out of their group and into the semi-finals, where they lost to the eventual champions Spain. Arshavin, who turns 31 on the eve of the tournament, played in every qualifying game without scoring but earned a hug and a kiss from Advocaat when he scored in the February friendly against Denmark in Copenhagen.

Pavel Pogrebnyak of Fulham is the only foreign-based player among Russia's Euro probables. The two other Russian legionnaires, Ajax striker Dmitri Bulykin and Sporting Lisbon midfielder Marat Izmailov, have both looked

GROUP A

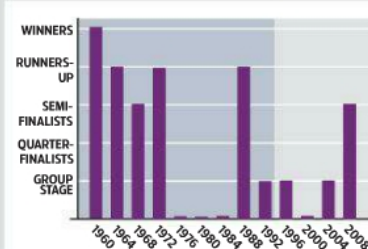
08.06.12	Czech Republic (Wroclaw, Pol)
12.06.12	Poland (Warsaw, Pol)
06.06.12	Greece (Warsaw, Pol)

good for their clubs but failed to impress the man who makes the decision. Advocaat's usual answer is that he already has stronger players in their positions. He used 23 players in the 10 qualifiers and says that he knew 20 of the 23 names for the final list months before the deadline.

The only disappointment with the draw was that the team will have to play in Poland. Going to Ukraine, where Russian is widely spoken alongside the national language and where Russians do not need visas, would have definitely been preferable. **WS**

EURO RECORD

1960 to 1988 as USSR; 1992 as CIS



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP B

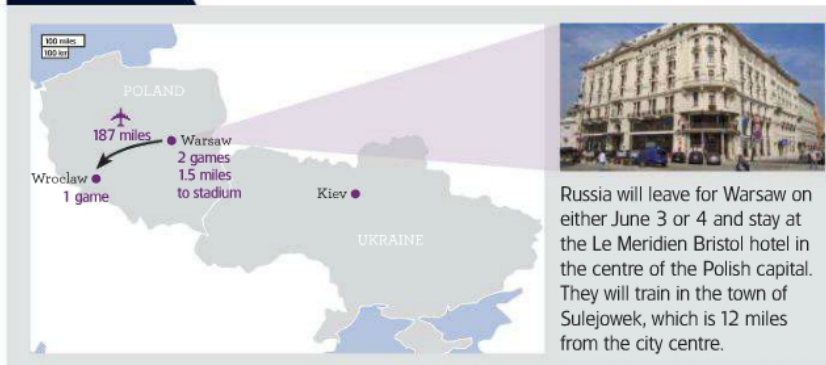
03.09.10	Andorra (a)	2-0
07.09.10	Slovakia (h)	0-1
08.10.10	Rep of Ireland (a)	3-2
12.10.10	Macedonia (a)	1-0
26.03.11	Armenia (a)	0-0
02.06.11	Armenia (h)	3-1
04.09.11	Macedonia (h)	1-0
06.09.11	Rep of Ireland (h)	0-0
07.10.11	Slovakia (a)	1-0
11.10.11	Andorra (h)	6-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Russia	10	7	2	1	17	4	23
Rep Ireland	10	6	3	1	15	7	21
Armenia	10	5	2	3	22	10	17
Slovakia	10	4	3	3	7	10	15
Macedonia	10	2	2	6	8	14	8
Andorra	10	0	0	10	1	25	0

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Denmark (a)	2-0
25.05.12	Uruguay (h)	
29.05.12	Lithuania (in Switzerland)	
01.06.12	Italy (in Switzerland)	

BASE CAMP



Dick Advocaat

“Players have to want to play for the national side. Otherwise, they needn't bother. The players do not have to be my friend”

The Russian season has been running for more than a year. Are you worried that your players will be tired?

The season finally ends on May 13 but the Cup Final has been moved from May 20 [to May 9]. I hope we can re-invigorate the players. I won't punish them in training, they need to be fresh.

How did you follow all your players last season?

So many are in Moscow that I can watch them in the league there. The major problem was with the internationals at foreign clubs who were not playing very often. Even Andrei Arshavin had difficulties at Arsenal [before he moved to Zenit St Petersburg].

Have you ever had problems with him or Roman Pavlyuchenko?

No. Look, it's quite simple. For all internationals they must want to play for the national team. Otherwise, they need not bother. Pavlyuchenko once said about me: "He picks his friends from Zenit" Nonsense, of course, because a coach always picks the best team available. Pavlyuchenko said it to my face but he later played in the team and everything was fine. That's how it works. The players do not have to be my friend.

Alan Dzagoev has been called the future of Russian football. Is he really that good?

He has a good head. That's a Hague expression for someone who knows what he really wants. He's a forward-thinking midfielder and I am actually quite an offensive-minded coach. I've been called a negative coach but I prefer to work with forward-thinking players.

So Russia will have attacking ambitions at the Euros?

Yes, with a tight organisation. We play with two attacking midfielders who have to press. It's a fixed system, always 4-3-3, the same one I played with at Zenit. It allows for lots of changes in personnel. I don't care about big names as long as they can play as a team. Everyone knows what their position is.

How high are expectations in Russia?

Russians are patriots and everyone is now saying that we have been drawn in a good group. It could have been a lot worse. The draw gives us the chance to progress. Look



In charge...Advocaat

COACH'S RECORD



Advocaat is unbeaten in 11 games, since February 2011, and has only lost one competitive fixture as Russia coach.



P	W	D	L
18	10	5	3

at Holland, with Portugal and Germany. For them, it will be very different.

But a good draw is relative. If you go through, you'll meet a team from the group of death in the quarters...

Right. As every coach says, you still have to beat everyone if you want to be champion. On their day every team from Group B can beat each other. If Greece can do it in 2004, so can we,

even though we play more offensively than them, of course.

So you won't change your team?

No, certainly not. We're not going to suddenly go defensive. In the qualifying we were successful because we went out to win games. We have to be positive.

What lessons have you learned from past European Championships?

It is important that players are given confidence. A top Russian player recently said: "Advocaat always makes us feel like winners." You also need to be calm.

What will your last team talk be like?

I'll speak up to 20 minutes, no more than that, even with an interpreter. I give a rough idea of how our opponents play, their key players, weaknesses. There'll be no time during the match to say anything, so organisation beforehand is so important.

Interview by Arnout Verzijl/ESM

Good move...Pavlyuchenko does not regret leaving his bit-part role at Tottenham for Lokomotiv Moscow



Roman Pavlyuchenko

“I was right to come home. To be part of the national squad it's not enough to keep coming on as a substitute from time to time”

How do you rate Russia's chances at the Euro finals?

Nobody expected us to do what we did last time, beating the Dutch and reaching the semi-finals – especially since good luck helped us get through, with Croatia beating England in the last qualifying game. We won the qualifying group this time which should give us more confidence. Maybe the fact that our rivals do not know exactly what to expect from us will help. Also, we have a very experienced team. We are not tournament favourites, but we will try to do our best and go step by step, thinking about one game at a time.

How do you rate your group opponents?

Many people say that we were lucky to get the opponents we got, comparing us to Ukraine who have to play England, France and Sweden. But our group is no easier than any other. Besides, we have a host team to play against in the second, maybe crucial game.

Was Euro 2012 the main reason you left Tottenham Hotspur and returned to Russia?

Yes, to a large extent. If you want to be part of the national squad, irrespective of all the past merits, it is not enough to come on as a substitute from time to time. I knew I would have a regular place at Lokomotiv [Moscow]. I thought a lot

about my situation, discussed it with my close friends. Now I know it was the right decision to come back to Russia.

It was a big surprise to many that you returned to Lokomotiv, rather than Spartak Moscow...

There was a general discussion with Spartak once, when I came to practice with them before a national-team training camp, but it did not go further than that. Lokomotiv made a specific offer. I remain a Spartak fan deep in my heart, but now my only club is Lokomotiv.

Did you have options in England and other countries?

Yes, but it was about joining this or that team on loan, which was unacceptable for Tottenham.

Is the competition tougher in England or Russia?

Now that we have a tournament of eight top teams, the struggle has become tougher in the Russian league. In England there are five top clubs and the rest. Here nobody is surprised when eighth-placed Kuban are close to beating Zenit or CSKA. And less classy teams are helped by the low quality of pitches in Russia. Sometimes you want to take the ball in your hands, carry and throw it like they do in rugby. The stronger sides are waiting for the grass to grow. The game is, of course,

speedier in England, and the general atmosphere is different. What is common for both leagues is that you are being ruthlessly hit. It is my job being hit, of course, but sometimes I think that football is turning into ice hockey.

How do you feel when you are used as a right midfielder?

Frankly, sometimes I do not know where to run in this case. But I am ready to accept any position on the pitch – even goalie if it is necessary.

Would you consider joining Anzhi if you got an offer from this nouveau riche club?

Why not?

Guus Hiddink once called you “a sleeping giant”...

The giant is awake when it is time to be. And I will never have hard feelings towards Guus, whatever he may say. You never get offended by him.

You had problems learning English while in London. Now the Lokomotiv president has ordered his players to learn it within six months. How will you all cope with it?

I can communicate and read in English now. It is important in today's life, of course. At the same time, why don't foreign coaches in Russia learn our language if they come to work here?

Interview by Victor Gusev

THE VIEW FROM RUSSIA



“Russia has the best group chance, although Poland will be strongly supported by their fans. Ours is the most impressive of the four teams, even though it is always hard to play against east European rivals, and the Greeks recently improved their defensive game a

lot. The best quarter-finals option for Dick Advocaat's squad would be the Dutch. We know their strong and weak points, besides he is Dutch himself. Anything can happen in football, but it would be fair if Spain and Germany met in the Final”

Yuri Semin, former Russia coach now in charge of Dynamo Kiev

“The transition from one Dutch manager to another was rather smooth and Russia won the qualification group pretty easily. If we do not qualify for the knockout stages the reaction in the country will be furious. Maybe the best we can hope for is the quarter-finals because Russia will then meet Germany, Holland or Portugal. Four years ago we destroyed Holland in the quarters but, as we say in Russia, two shells never fall into one hole”

Igor Rabiner of Russian newspaper Sport-Express

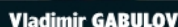
“Russia's strong point is a very experienced squad. It will be the swansong for a number of our players, so they will use their last chance to the maximum. We have a good chance to reach the semi-finals. We were lucky that some players who had to sit on the bench abroad returned home just in time to get match practice before the start of the Euro games”

Sergei Kiriakov, Russia youth-team coach and former international

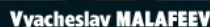
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0



Saved a penalty on his CSKA league debut, aged 16. Made his international debut at 18. Returned to action in April after eight months out with a snapped cruciate ligament in his left knee.



QR: 0 games/0 goals
Left CSKA for first-team action due to Akinfeev's presence. Returned last season on loan when the first choice was injured. The most consistent performer in the Russian league of late.

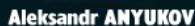


QR: 4 games/0 goals
A UEFA Cup winner in 2008, he lost his wife in a car crash last year. Played his first game for the national team in 2003 in a Euro qualifier away to Wales.

Former national coach of Holland, UAE and South Korea, he resigned six-and-a-half months into his contract with Belgium to succeed countryman Guus Hiddink in the Russia job. Nicknamed 'Little General', he won the Russian league in 2007 and the 2008 UEFA Cup with Zenit. Made an Honorary Citizen of St Petersburg – becoming the first foreign honorary citizen since 1866. Also a league champion in Holland (with PSV Eindhoven) and Scotland (with Rangers, twice).



63
1



QR: 8 games/0 goals  Fast and energetic right-back with a powerful shot who was made club captain by Advocaat at Zenit. Wanted to be a striker when a boy. Loves fishing and cooking.



QR: 6 games/0 goals  Right-back who can also play as a centre-back. He is 20 minutes younger than his twin brother Vasil. Often called "wooden soldier", just like his brother, for an alleged lack of technical skill and mobility.



QR: 10 games/0 goals  Powerful in the air, he has been at the heart of the CSKA and Russia defence with his twin brother for a decade. A CSKA coach once said he could only tell them apart in training by the colour of their boots.



QR: 9 games/1 goal  
The centre-half could be a doubt after breaking a toe during training in April. A free-kick and penalty specialist, he is nicknamed "Sergei the Silent" as he refuses to give interviews to the media.



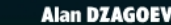
QR: 0 games
Can play anywhere in midfield but likely to be cover for Zhirkov at left-back. Joined Spartak with his twin brother Kirill, after six seasons with Dinamo Moscow, in 2010.

$$\frac{46}{6}$$


QR: 5 games/1 goal  Son of a Lokomotiv coach, he joined Everton in 2009 for £9m before returning to Spartak this year. The central playmaker is said to be unhappy at recently being played as a winger by his country.



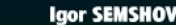
QR: 7 games/0 goals ■■■
Holding midfielder with good passing ability. Turned down the chance to appear for Russia at Euro 2008. Made his international debut in 2008 in a 2010 World Cup qualifier against Germany.



QR: 8 games/4 goals
Probably Russia's most talented young player in recent years, he is at his best when allowed to roam freely in midfield, linking with the front man. Top scorer in qualifying.



QR: 3 games/1 goal
Joined Lokomotiv at 18 and recently became club captain. Creative with a good shot. Made his international debut in March 2011.



QR: 7 games/1 goal
Hard working, he participated in the 2002 World Cup, and the 2004 and 2008 Euros. Famous for kicking a referee in the backside during a Russian league game.

68
17

QR: 10 games/0 goals
Currently back in Russia on loan to Zenit. National team captain who is equally good on either flank, in the centre or up front. Often criticised by fans for alleged "laziness" and "excess weight".



QR: 5 games/2 goals Had two years in Spain with Sevilla before returning to Russia with Dynamo Moscow and then rejoining Zenit in 2010. Wrote a biography at 20 and named Russian player of the year in 2010.



QR: 0 games
Started out as a boxer before joining Lokomotiv Moscow's football academy. Joined Dynamo and scored on his debut in 2008. Made his senior international debut in October 2011.



QR: 7 games/4 goals
Ex-Spartak centre-forward who joined Tottenham Hotspur in a £14m deal following Euro 2008. Signed by Lokomotiv this year. Has criticised Advocaat in the past for his alleged favouritism.



QR: 7 games/2 goals
Made an impressive start in England, after joining Fulham on loan in January. Began at Spartak Moscow, but sold to Siberian club Tom Tomsk in 2006. Moved to Germany via Zenit in 2009.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Lack of young new talent means being forced to stick with the old guard

Being a conservative type, Advocaat will almost certainly stick with the tried-and-tested old guard, who ensured Russia's qualification for the finals, rather than adding fresh blood – although mostly because there is little new, bright talent to choose from in the domestic league at present.

In Advocaat's likely 4-3-3, the central striker is joined by two wide men who will interchange and move inside, opening up the wings for the full-backs to go forward. The lone



8
0

Roman SHISHKIN

Age 25 (27.01.87)
Lokomotiv Moscow
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Attacking right-back who is also a free-kick specialist. Made his national team debut five years ago. Regained his place in the squad after joining Lokomotiv in 2010.



49
0

Yuri ZHIRKOV

Age 28 (20.08.83)
Anzhi Makhachkala
QR: 8 games/0 goals
Good dribbler who was turned from an attacking midfielder into a left-back by Hiddink. Joined Chelsea from CSKA Moscow for £18m in 2009 before moving to big-spending Anzhi last year.



19
4

Roman SHIROKOV

Age 30 (06.06.81)
Zenit
QR: 8 games/1 goal
Dropped by Hiddink after a disastrous Euro 2008 opener against Spain at centre-back, but recalled by Advocaat as a playmaker. Scored five goals in this season's Champions League.



26
2

Dmitri TORBINSKY

Age 28 (28.04.84)
Lokomotiv Moscow
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Born in the northern city of Norilsk. An energetic all-rounder, but his quick temper means he often picks up cards. A music lover, he plays several instruments.



47
7

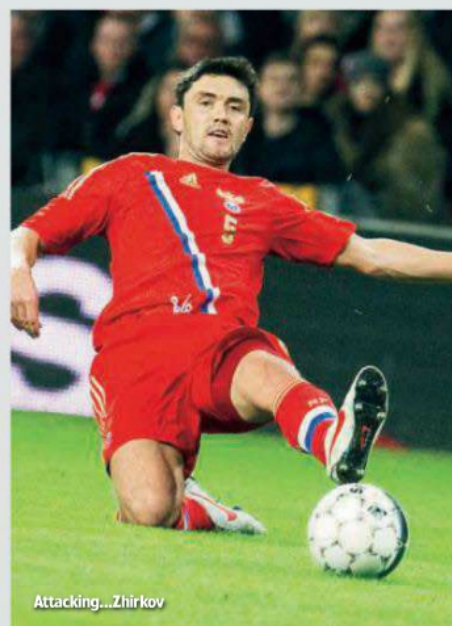
Konstantin ZYRYANOV

Age 34 (05.10.77)
Zenit
QR: 9 games/0 goals
Started his career as a striker and now often arrives from deep to score vital goals. A good reader of the game, he can play as a stopper or in a more advanced role. First capped at 28.

front runner may also be joined by a second forward during the course of the game.

The midfield triangle is usually made up of one or two ball winners and one or two playmakers, depending on the opponent. But while there are a few substitution possibilities in midfield, there are almost no alternatives at the back.

Victor Gusev



Attacking...Zhirkov

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPERS

Sergei RYZHIKOV

Age 31 (19.09.80)
Rubin Kazan
Cap 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Had his moments of glory in the Champions League, but prone to mistakes and a suspect temper.

Anton SHUNIN

Age 25 (27.01.87)
Dynamo Moscow
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Returned to action in March after a serious injury last year.

DEFENDERS

Taras BURLAK

Age 22 (22.02.90)
Lokomotiv Moscow
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Centre-back who may be chosen as a substitute for Ignashevich.

Sergei PARSHIVLYUK

Age 23 (18.03.89)
Spartak Moscow
Caps 0
Began as a striker, gradually evolving into a creative, pacy right-back and club captain.

Georgi SCHENNIKOV

Age 21 (27.04.91)
CSKA Moscow
Caps 0
Left-back who may be called-up because of injuries.

Renat YANBAEV

Age 28 (07.04.84)
Lokomotiv Moscow
Caps 11 (0 goals)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Full-back, comfortable on either flank, who Hiddink once called the fastest player in Europe.

MIDFIELDERS

Viktor FAYZULIN

Age 26 (22.04.86)
Zenit
Caps 0
Joined Zenit from Spartak Nalchik in 2008.

Sergei SEMAK

Age 28 (31.01.84)
Zenit
Caps 65 (4 goals)
QR: 0 games
Formerly with CSKA Moscow, Paris Saint-Germain and Rubin Kazan.

FORWARDS

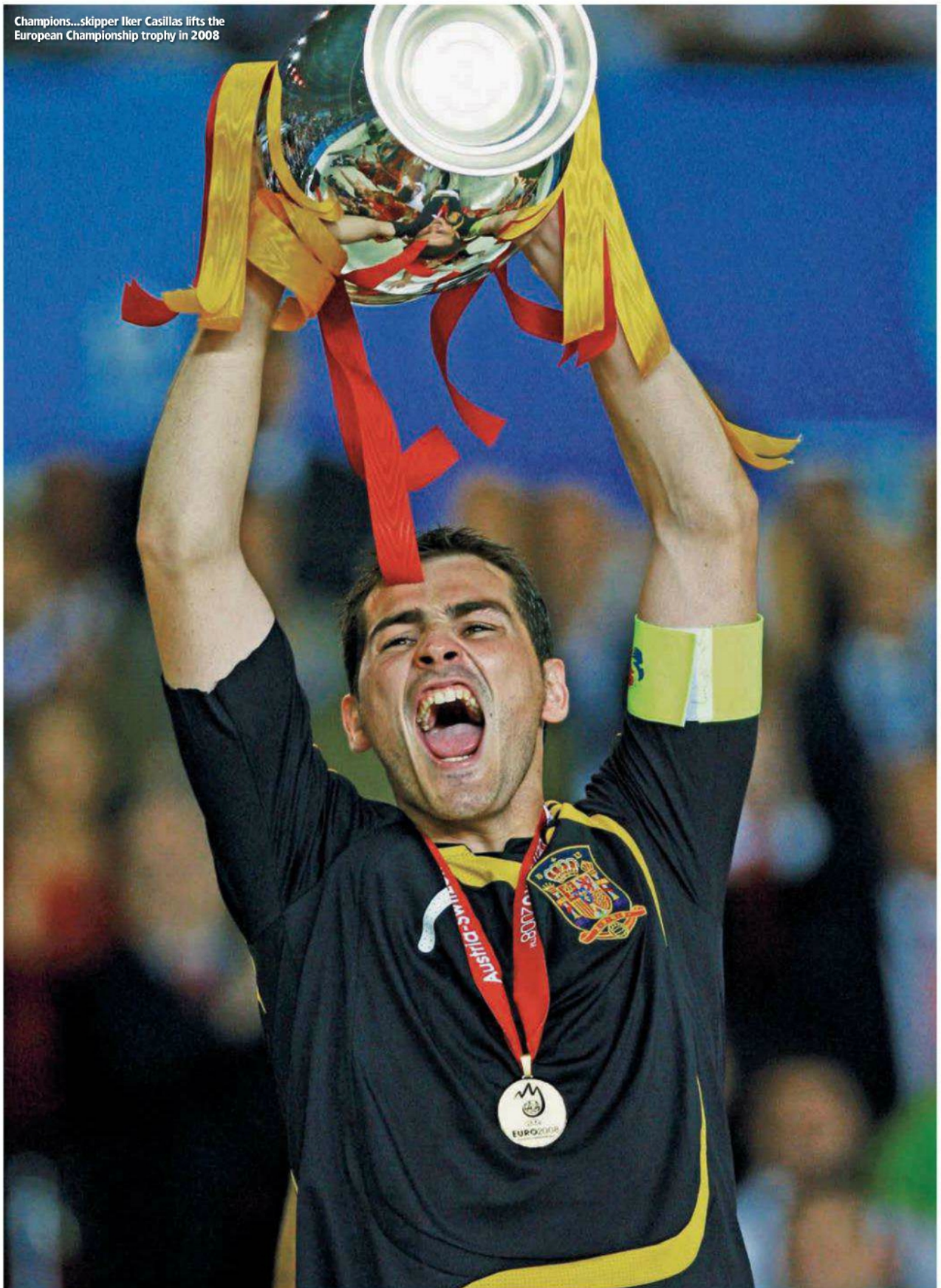
Vladimir BYSTROV

Age 28 (31.01.84)
Zenit
Caps 35 (4 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Skillful right-winger, whose last name fittingly translates as "fast".

Aleksandr SAMEDOV

Age 27 (19.07.84)
Dynamo Moscow
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Quick right-winger who is an accurate passer.

Champions...skipper Iker Casillas lifts the European Championship trophy in 2008





SPAIN

Favourites for a reason

The Spanish success story seems set to run and run



SID LOWE
in Madrid

Spain are the world and European champions. They qualified for this summer's competition with an eight-wins-from-eight record. They hold the world record for winning 14 competitive games in a row. And they followed up their qualifying campaign with a stunning 5-0 victory in a friendly against Venezuela that showcased them at their very best. Success at Euro 2008 and in South Africa two years later did not just wipe out the past, it provided a road map for the future.

There are very few teams so clear in their identity, so assured when it comes to how they are going to play.

The nucleus of those teams is still together and, of their key players, only Marcos Senna is no longer around – and Spain won the World Cup without him. This may be the last chance for Carles Puyol and Xavi, possibly even David Villa too, but they will be there. Add to that the fact they are European Under-21 champions and there is another generation of wonderful players coming through – Jordi Alba, Thiago Alcantara and Iker Muniain did not go to South Africa but may well travel to Poland – and it is easy to see why Spain are deemed favourites.

In fact, if you want to see why they are favourites, just watch them. Better still, watch them do an astonishing keep-ball drill in training as the ball zips round the circle.

Spain are unique. The touch and technique is unrivalled as is the dominance of possession. When they attack, they do not hammer away at defences. Instead, they pick off the opposition, removing their armour piece by piece, playing with patience and precision. In tight spaces,

they are often breathtakingly brilliant.

At the World Cup they struggled for goals, but that was a product of the ultra-defensive approach of their opponents and in the end they found a way through. Vicente Del Bosque has worked on adding variety. He had already employed players who slightly broke the mould – the direct-running Jesus Navas and the superb aerial ability of Fernando Llorente, for example. Now, Muniain has been given a chance and David Silva has tried a new role up front, while Alba offers more dynamism on the left.

Besides, their *tiki-taka* style wasn't just about creating chances. They limited chances for the opposition by wearing them out. It was defensive as well as offensive. "When we did eventually win the ball we were so exhausted from chasing it we couldn't do anything with it," admitted Miroslav Klose after the World Cup semi-final against Germany. Spain had produced 160 passes more; Germany ran 1.2 miles more.

Glimpse of mortality

Of course there are doubts. A glimpse of mortality has been provided by friendly results, with Portugal and Argentina both putting four past them. It was perhaps natural the focus and intensity would not be the same – and there is little doubt that the players were far from happy about the organisation of the trip to South America – but there is a certain degree of concern and Spain are not without problems.

When Athletic Bilbao face Barcelona in the Spanish Cup Final on May 25, a game which could include as many as 13 players from the

GROUP C

10.06.12	Italy (Gdansk, Pol)
14.06.12	Republic of Ireland (Gdansk, Pol)
18.06.12	Croatia (Gdansk, Pol)

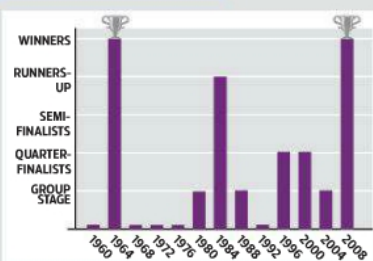
seleccion, most other nations will already be in their pre-tournament training camps. As usual, Spain's federation has broken the UEFA deadline. The impact could be detrimental, as could the impact of an extremely successful season.

Del Bosque has insisted he is not concerned about the deterioration of relationships between players from Barcelona and Real Madrid, and that they are intelligent and mature enough to understand the difference between club and country.

Then there is the injury to Villa, their most important striker. He will make it to Poland, his broken leg healed, but in what shape?

At least these are largely issues Spain have confronted and overcome before. Poor organisation at federation level is not new and Andres Iniesta only just made it to South Africa. Some thought he was not ready. A month later, his goal gave Spain the World Cup. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP I

03.09.10	Liechtenstein (a)	4-0
08.10.10	Lithuania (h)	3-1
12.10.10	Scotland (a)	3-2
25.03.11	Czech Republic (h)	2-1
29.03.11	Lithuania (a)	3-1
06.09.11	Liechtenstein (h)	6-0
07.10.11	Czech Republic (a)	2-0
11.10.11	Scotland (h)	3-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	8	8	0	0	26	6	24
Czech Rep	8	4	1	3	12	8	13
Scotland	8	3	2	3	9	10	11
Lithuania	8	1	2	5	4	13	5
L'chtenstein	8	1	1	6	3	17	4

FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Venezuela (h)	5-0
26.05.12	Serbia (in Switzerland)	
30.05.12	South Korea (in Austria)	
03.06.12	China (h)	

BASE CAMP



Spain will be staying at the Hotel Mistral Sport in Gniezno, a village 35 miles from Gdansk, and training at the local stadium.

Vicente Del Bosque

“I feel very privileged to have coincided with a generation of such brilliance”

It seems like barely yesterday that you won the World Cup. Already the European Championship is upon us...

We want to defend the title that the team won so brilliantly in 2008. We know it is difficult – so difficult in fact that no team has won three tournaments in a row before. We're really looking forward to competing. We have played well, with one or two exceptions in friendlies [Spain were beaten by Portugal and Argentina]. We have tried to make sure that success does not effect us adversely. We've tried to get the idea into the players' heads that they cannot drop their guard. The difficulty you have as a national team coach is continuity.

How would you explain Spain's recent success?

I feel very privileged to have coincided with a generation of such brilliance. That's one thing. Then there are a number of factors of course. One of the fundamental issues is the good relationship that exists within the group. I have been fortunate to have a good group made up of nice people. It is important to reinforce the relations that exist between the players. That was a key part of our success in recent years. We have worked with a sense of normality that has been very positive. Another factor is that we are faithful to a style of play. I'd also suggest a third factor: nobody relaxes, these players are very competitive.

There have been suggestions that club football could be the undoing of the national team. Is there a sense of relief that Real Madrid and Barcelona did not make it to the Champions League final?

No. It would have been very good for Spanish football to have had them in the Final. I don't think that it would have done us any harm. I said before that whatever happened would not have repercussions for the *seleccion*. I think Spanish football should enjoy the moment. It's not easy for a single country to have five European semi-finalists. That shows that Spanish football is in good shape.

What about the final of the Spanish Cup? Athletic Bilbao will play Barcelona as late as May 25...

There are not many dates in the

calendar and that was the [only] option. They will play, then have a break and join the squad. In the meantime, we will use some of the players from the Olympic squad for games and [training] sessions.

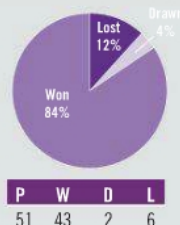
There has been a lot of talk about who you take as your no9, not least because of the doubts over Fernando Torres and David Villa...

The hardest thing about being a national manager is that you have to leave people out who have done enough to deserve a place, players who are regulars for their club. Or you have players on the bench and they are not happy. There is a chance [for Villa and Torres]. I don't really know how to define [Torres's situation]. He was not playing regularly. It's difficult because he is not just another player, he is a footballer who has done a lot for Spain and played over 90 games. Villa's injury was a real set-back. Firstly for him but also for Spain. He played a huge part in us becoming world champions and has been with us for a long time. He is a good person and well-liked by everyone in the squad. I have spoken to him and the people round him and they think he will be ready. We are talking about the best goal scorer Spain has, so we will wait as long as we can for him.

COACH'S RECORD



Del Bosque set a world record for a national coach in winning his first 13 games, in the process helping Spain to a record-equalling 35 games without loss.



What do you make of the group?

It's difficult. Ireland and Croatia made it through the play-offs, that's true, but they were clearly the better sides in their respective games. And as for Italy, that's a bit of a classic now. It will be hard.

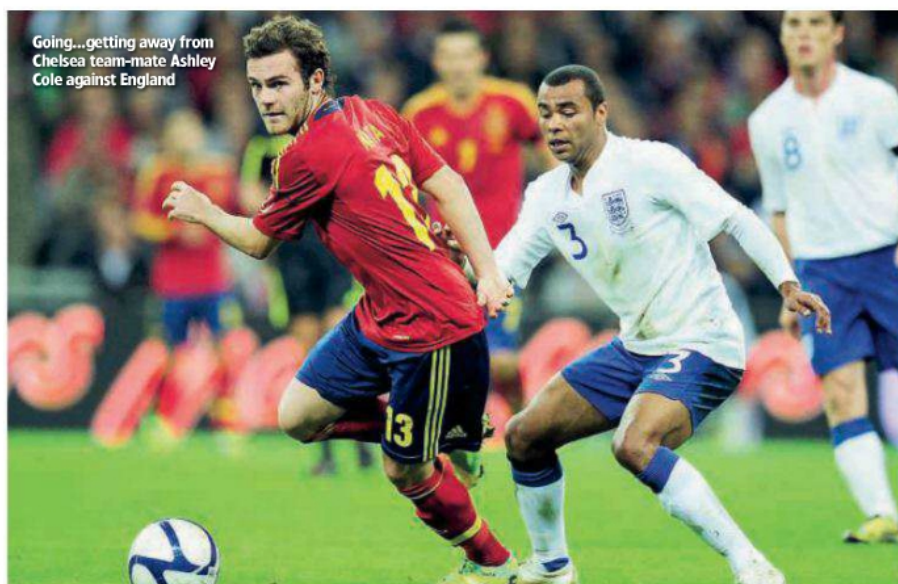
Spain are favourites...

We're not the only favourites. Holland, runners-up at the World Cup, had a perfect qualifying campaign and are playing well. I hardly need to mention Germany. You can't forget England, Italy, France or Portugal. It could be like Denmark in 1992 or Greece in 2004 – maybe someone unexpected will win it. I see so many good teams. And as for winning three tournaments in a row? No one has ever done it: that tells you how difficult it is.

Interview by John Holmesdale



World champions...Del Bosque with his players in South Africa



Going...getting away from Chelsea team-mate Ashley Cole against England

Juan Mata

“There’s a real faith in the approach now; the legacy of victory is a confidence for the future too”

Once upon a time, we’d be looking ahead to a major tournament with the old line about Spain as international football’s great underachievers. Now, things could hardly be any different...

The 2008 European Championships changed everything and then the World Cup confirmed it. It showed us that Spain could be one of the great teams after all, that we really could compete. The build-up is different now. And now we have the chance to do something unique in history and win three tournaments in a row. Beyond the results, the most important thing about 2008 and 2010 was that it reinforced what we were doing, convincing us that we were on the right path – in terms of the group, the atmosphere, and the style of play. The identity and style has been cemented. There’s a real faith in the approach now; the legacy of victory is a confidence for the future too.

How important was South Africa in that process or was Euro 2008 enough?

Austria was the start, but I think the World Cup was significant. There’s nothing bigger than the World Cup and if we had not won there then I am sure that there would have been some people questioning the style and the approach, despite 2008. It would have provoked a degree of mistrust in our

way of playing which might have had an impact. I think we’re now more convinced than ever that this is the right way of playing.

You’re up against Italy in the group, which may bring back memories of the last European Championship...

That was a turning point. It was always the same thing: “Spain never get beyond the quarters.” And it was Italy, who had always proven so difficult for us, in the quarters. It was hard, but when Spain got through against them on penalties that changed attitudes, ideas and mentalities with the *seleccion* which carried through to South Africa and until now.

What do you make of your group?

Italy are one of those teams that can play better or worse and can come into a tournament winning or losing, and it makes no difference. They are always extremely competitive. They’re the first game and that might condition the rest of the group. Mind you, it is always said that you cannot afford to lose in the first game and yet we showed at the World Cup after losing to Switzerland that there is sometimes time to make up for your mistakes.

What about Ireland and Croatia?

Naturally, we haven’t yet been able to analyse them properly but there are players I know, like Modric from Spurs

who will be playing for Croatia. I think he’s a great player. Croatia tend to be a side that is built on talent and technical ability from the midfield forward, with a tough defence behind. I expect Ireland to play in an English style, to be physical and hard to break down. There will be time to study them more closely when the squad comes together.

Beyond Spain, who would you single out as the favourites?

I like Germany and Holland, both for the way they play and their youth. Then there’s Italy, England and France. Germany play with a very high tempo, they’re skilful and quick. Their qualification campaigns were almost perfect both for the World Cup and the Euros and they have changed their philosophy a little – they’re less physical than they were traditionally.

Where do you see yourself on July 1?

I don’t think you can think ahead. We never did in South Africa – if you do that and you go out in the group, then what? Thinking too far ahead is a mistake. But of course I would love to be in the Final.

And then off to the Olympics? It’s going to be a busy summer...

Yes, hopefully. I’d love to have very few days’ summer holiday – that would be a sign that things have gone really well at both competitions. For a footballer, it’s wonderful to have the chance to play in one tournament, so imagine two. And being in London makes the Olympics special for me too. I’m sure loads of friends and family will come to see me.

Interview by Sid Lowe

THE VIEW FROM SPAIN



“The feeling is that we could do the “trirecord” (Euro, World Cup and Euro), something no team has ever achieved before, but that this tournament will be harder than the previous two. Key players will arrive very tired (Xavi, Xabi Alonso) and secondly,

Germany are in a strong position to end the Spanish era. They have an excellent team”

Juan Castro, Marca



“Spain face the Barcelona problem: the more you win, the less you want to win. It is not that the team or players have lost their hunger, it is that they are no longer fighting against history, trying to break almost eternal obstacles (quarter-finals), reach new barriers (winning the World Cup). That kind of thing that brings out of you a percentage more than the rest. Now they themselves are their main rivals. So there is only one thing to do to get the best of Spain: try to play the usual way and wait for that hunger to be replaced by talent. And hope we are also a bit lucky as we had been in the last couple of tournaments”

Guillem Balague, Sky Sports, AS

GOALKEEPERS



128
0

Iker CASILLAS

Age 30 (20.05.81)
Real Madrid
QR: 7 games/0 goals
They call the captain "Saint Iker" because of the miracles he performs game after game. After the last Euros there was a campaign to rename a street in Madrid "The Mother That Gave Birth To Casillas Street".



24
0

Pepe REINA

Age 29 (31.08.82)
Liverpool (Eng)
QR: 0 goals
The perfect back-up, talented and reliable but also intelligent and well-liked. Became a cult figure when taking to the mic to introduce the team to the fans, player by player, after Euro 2008 and 2010 World Cup.



7
0

Victor VALDES

Age 30 (14.01.82)
Barcelona
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Spain's third-choice goalkeeper, but could be first choice for just about anyone else. Concentration is a particular strong point, as is his ability with the ball at his feet – which is vital for the way Barca play.

COACH

Vicente DEL BOSQUE

Age 61 (23.12.50)
Spain coach since July 2008
Took over from Luis Aragonés, who had led the side to success at Euro 2008, and guided *La Roja* to their first-ever World Cup triumph two years later. Won the Champions League twice while in charge of Real Madrid (in 2000 and 2002) and, along with Marcello Lippi, he is the only coach to have won the Champions League and the World Cup. Capped 18 times as a player, he represented his country at Euro 80 – where they failed to win a game.



DEFENDERS



3
0

Jordi ALBA

Age 23 (21.03.89)
Valencia
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Creative midfielder turned left-winger who Valencia coach Unai Emery has successfully converted into an attacking full-back – good news for Del Bosque in his search for a successor to Joan Capdevila.



33
0

Alvaro ARBEOA

Age 29 (17.01.83)
Real Madrid
QR: 6 games/0 goals 
Tough, intelligent and reliable full-back. Always chooses England at PlayStation when away with the Spain squad and even parades round the hotel with the Three Lions on his chest.



7
0

Andoni IRAOLA

Age 29 (22.06.82)
Athletic Bilbao
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Skilful right-back who is tidy in possession and adept at joining the attack. His position has been strengthened by a fine club season but he is still likely to start as a sub.



7
0

Javi MARTINEZ

Age 23 (02.09.88)
Athletic Bilbao
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Skilful all-action midfielder who has been converted to a centre-back by Marcelo Bielsa at Bilbao. Del Bosque admires his versatility and has also tried him as a central defender with good results.



38
4

Gerard PIQUE

Age 25 (02.02.87)
Barcelona
QR: 7 games/0 goals
Known as "Piquenbaur" for the way he strides elegantly out of the back with the ball under control. Technically gifted but has not had the best of seasons and has been prone to lapses of concentration.

MIDFIELDERS



38
0

Sergio BUSQUETS

Age 23 (16.07.88)
Barcelona
QR: 7 games/0 goals
Always appreciated by his coaches, he has now won over the critics too. Tactically astute and a strong tackler. Can appear to take risks – until you realise it's no coincidence he always gets away with them.



40
4

Santi CAZORLA

Age 27 (13.12.84)
Malaga
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Missed the World Cup because of injury but was called up for the post-tournament friendlies. Creative playmaker who moves the ball with pace and precision. Comfortable on either foot.



63
8

Cesc FABREGAS

Age 26 (04.05.87)
Barcelona
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Ended up playing a key role in 2008 and 2010 but did so from the bench. Returned to Barca from Arsenal to stake a claim for a starting place with Spain – which is still not guaranteed.



64
11

Andres INIESTA

Age 27 (11.05.84)
Barcelona
QR: 5 games/1 goal
Scored the World Cup-winning goal and Spain's most impressive performer over the last decisive games in South Africa. Skilful, agile and with a habit of saving the few goals he gets for the big moments.



16
5

Juan MATA

Age 24 (28.04.88)
Chelsea (Eng)
QR: 3 games/2 goals
Once represented Asturias, his region of Spain, in an international quiz competition after winning a national tournament. Clever on the pitch too, where he has an eye for a pass, quick feet and neat finishing.

FORWARDS



20
7

Fernando LLORENTE

Age 27 (26.02.85)
Athletic Bilbao
QR: 5 games/3 goals
For the third year in a row he has scored more headers than anyone in La Liga. Not just a target man, he is technically sound, good in possession and adept at bringing others into the game.



1
0

Iker MUNIAIN

Age 19 (19.12.92)
Athletic Bilbao
QR: 0 goals
Always eager to run at defenders and battle with the biggest of them, he adds a touch of fantasy and feistiness. Was given his first Spain cap against Venezuela in February.



55
15

David SILVA

Age 26 (08.01.86)
Manchester City (Eng)
QR: 6 games/4 goals
Started only one game at the World Cup – the loss to Switzerland – and complained he felt ignored. His City displays, and maybe his decision to speak out, have persuaded Del Bosque to find him a role.



3
3

Roberto SOLDADO

Age 26 (26.11.85)
Valencia
QR: 0 goals
Combative centre-forward who is a clever finisher. His return to the international scene in February was his first cap since 2007 – and he scored a hat-trick.



82
51

David VILLA

Age 30 (30.12.81)
Barcelona
QR: 8 games/7 goals
Spain's all-time top scorer, he broke a leg during the Club World Cup, but Del Bosque insists he will wait for him. It is the second broken leg he has suffered, the first came when he was aged four.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

More of the same from Del Bosque as *tiki-taka* rules

Spain's style is now non-negotiable – which means dominance of possession and a game built around their passing ability. They will play what is broadly speaking a 4-2-3-1 or a 4-3-3, in which a relatively narrow midfield/forward line is encouraged to come inside with width provided by the full-backs.

Busquets and Xabi Alonso will underpin the midfield behind Xavi, whose role will be an interesting one as there were moments at



Carles PUYOL

Age 34 (13.04.78)
Barcelona
QR: 4 games/0 goals
Brings leadership, aggression and intensity to the back four. Having been persuaded to continue in the national team after the World Cup, this will be his last tournament.



Sergio RAMOS

Age 26 (30.03.86)
Real Madrid
QR: 8 games/1 goal
After playing as a right-back at Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup, he has spent the whole of this season at centre-back for Real Madrid. In the long term that will be his role for Spain.



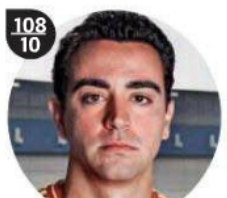
Jesus NAVAS

Age 26 (21.11.85)
Sevilla
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Provides something a little different with pure pace on the right wing. Used to suffer with anxiety problems when away from home, but was able to successfully join the squad in South Africa.



XABI ALONSO

Age 30 (25.11.81)
Real Madrid
QR: 6 game/1 goal
An intelligent reader of the game and an impeccable passer, he is the linchpin of Real Madrid's midfield – the man who plays and makes others play too.



XAVI

Age 32 (25.01.80)
Barcelona
QR: 6 games/2 goals
Arguably the best player Spain has ever produced, he has imposed a new, technical, passing style on two of the best teams in history: Barcelona and Spain. Achilles problems continue to bug him.

the last World Cup where he appeared to be too far forward, distanced a little from the middle of the pitch and the inception of moves. Del Bosque could try to add an extra creative midfielder by playing with just Busquets, allowing him to find a place for Silva or Cazorla and an out-and-out striker. Alternatively, he could choose to give Fabregas a role.

Up front, the alternatives if Villa is unfit are Llorente or even Silva as a false no 9.

Sid Lowe



Aerial threat
...Llorente

ALSO IN CONTENTION

DEFENDERS

Raul ALBIOL

Age 26 (04.09.85)
Real Madrid
Caps 31 (0 goals)
QR: 3 games/0 goals
Reserve centre-back at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Alberto BOTIA

Age 23 (27.01.89)
Sporting Gijon
Caps 0
Barcelona-raised, former under-21 centre-back who is now on the fringes of the senior squad.

Nacho MONREAL

Age 26 (26.02.86)
Malaga
Caps 5 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Reserve left-back.

MIDFIELDERS

BRUNO Soriano

Age 27 (12.06.84)
Villarreal
Caps 2 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Defensive midfielder who has been called into the squad since the World Cup.

Oscar DE MARCOS

Age 23 (14.04.89)
Athletic Bilbao
Caps 0
One of the stars of Athletic's impressive Europa League campaign this season.

THIAGO ALCANTARA

Age 21 (11.04.91)
Barcelona
Caps 3 (0 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
The son of former midfielder Mazinho, who won the World Cup with Brazil in 1994.

Borja VALERO

Age 27 (12.01.85)
Villarreal
Caps 1 (0 goals)
QR: 0 games
Scored the winner in the 2004 Euro Under-19 Final.

FORWARDS

Alvaro NEGREDO

Age 26 (20.08.85)
Sevilla
Caps 7 (5 goals)
QR: 1 game/2 goals
Strong, powerful and skilful.

PEDRO

Age 24 (28.07.87)
Barcelona
Caps 15 (2 goals)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
Started the 2010 World Cup Final but his form has dipped this season at Barca.

Fernando TORRES

Age 28 (20.03.84)
Chelsea (Eng)
Caps 91 (27 goals)
QR: 3 games/2 goals
Dropped from the February friendly against Venezuela following his poor form at Chelsea.

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Class act...Sweden need Ibrahimovic at his very best if they are to go through





SWEDEN

Over to you, Zlatan

Milan star Ibrahimovic can inspire Hamren's men



JOHANNA GARA
in Stockholm

Sweden qualified for Euro 2012 as the best group runners-up after scoring an impressive 31 goals in 10 games. But it was a shaky ride for Erik Hamren's men after they were left in a state of shock by a thrashing in Holland and the campaign produced a series of highs and lows.

To avoid the play-offs Sweden had to beat the Dutch in the final game – and without the suspended Zlatan Ibrahimovic. But they did just that, despite trailing 2-1 early in the second half. A 3-2 victory provoked a national euphoria and a sigh of relief as Sweden finally found themselves back with the big boys.

Four years have passed since the national side have competed in a major tournament and many things have changed. Two of the three big stars, Fredrik Ljungberg and Henrik Larsson, have retired from international football, and a group of less experienced players, most from the successful under-21 team, have come in.

The boss is also new. Lars Lagerback, who had taken the country to five straight major championships, quit after failing to qualify for the World Cup in South Africa – although he still went, with Nigeria.

His successor, Hamren, made a somewhat tricky start and at his first press conference, in November 2009, he had to break the news that the third star, Ibrahimovic, was taking time out from the national team. However, the Milan forward did come back seven months later and was made captain.

The change in coach was much needed as Sweden had tired of Lagerback's safety-first tactics. There is now widespread optimism

about Hamren's more attacking approach, but it is hard to know what to expect from his team, especially since the defence is weaker.

While veteran Olof Mellberg is still a top-class defender, his colleagues are not. When Daniel Majstorovic damaged his knee in February, Hamren had to find a new partner for Mellberg, settling on the internationally inexperienced Jonas Olsson of West Bromwich Albion.

Left-back has been a revolving door, with Oscar Wendt and Behrang Safari both dropped after poor displays. Safari has since been reprieved but now trails Martin Olsson of Blackburn Rovers in the queue. Olsson has done OK but his patchy defending has been exposed in the Premier League.

Right-back Mikael Lustig played every minute of the qualifying campaign but has had injuries lately and featured little for Celtic. There is no ready-made substitute so the probable back-up will be centre-back Andreas Granqvist.

Much brighter

In attack things look much brighter. The big breakthrough has been Manchester City's 20-year-old John Guidetti, on loan at Feyenoord and who was handed his first cap in February. Johan Elmander also had a great first season with Galatasaray in Turkey, while Ola Toivonen continued to shine for PSV Eindhoven.

And then there is Ibrahimovic. The most high-profile Swede polarises opinion, with half the country in love with him and the other constantly finding new reasons to dislike him. Some even think he affects the team negatively, that they play better without him. It is true a

GROUP

11.06.12	Ukraine (Kiev, Ukr)
15.06.12	England (Kiev, Ukr)
19.06.12	France (Kiev, Ukr)

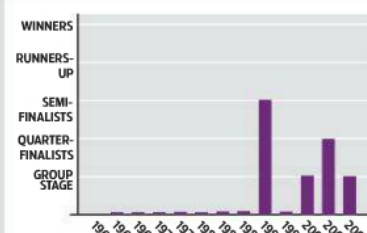
bored and irritated Ibrahimovic spreads a lot of negative energy around him on the pitch, but when he is in the right mood he carries the team on his shoulders – as he showed in the 3-1 win over Croatia in February, scoring one goal and making the other two.

Sweden's destiny at Euro 2012 is to a large extent down to which Ibrahimovic turns up. The captain has to perform at his highest level for the team to advance from the group.

And he aims high. When he announced his return, Ibrahimovic said he felt Hamren and he shared the same winning mentality. He even made everybody in the room laugh when he added: "And Erik has promised me a medal."

He was probably only half joking. **WS**

EURO RECORD



QUALIFYING CAMPAIGN

GROUP E

03.09.10	Hungary (h)	2-0
07.09.10	San Marino (h)	6-0
12.10.10	Holland (a)	1-4
29.03.11	Moldova (h)	2-1
03.06.11	Moldova (a)	4-1
07.06.11	Finland (h)	5-0
02.09.11	Hungary (a)	1-2
06.09.11	San Marino (a)	5-0
07.10.11	Finland (a)	2-1
11.10.11	Holland (h)	3-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	10	9	0	1	37	8	27
Sweden*	10	8	0	2	31	11	24
Hungary	10	6	1	3	22	14	19
Finland	10	3	1	6	16	16	10
Moldova	10	3	0	7	12	16	9
San Marino	10	0	0	10	0	53	0

* qualified as best runner-up

FRIENDLIES 2012

18.01.12	Bahrain (n)	2-0
29.02.12	Croatia (a)	3-1
30.05.12	Iceland (h)	
05.06.12	Serbia (h)	

BASE CAMP





Sweden will be staying in the Platinum Hotel in Kozyn, 15 miles outside Kiev, and using Dynamo Kiev's Koncha Zaspas Training Centre. They will share the facilities with hosts Ukraine.

Erik Hamren

“Everyone has an opinion about Zlatan Ibrahimovic but for me he is a fantastic player who can give us that little bit extra”

How would you describe your football philosophy?

I like to watch attacking football – quick and technical – which generates many scoring opportunities and goals. Of course it depends on the opponent how attacking your team can be, but I aim to coach the type of football I want to see.

Why is team building so important to you?

Sweden is a small country and we don't have as many individually good players as the big football nations. To be able to compete and win we have to be strong as a team – the whole squad and staff, not just the players on the pitch – and try to be better than the rest in other aspects of the game.

Like diet, for example?

Well, yes. I put a lot of focus on the diet. My players must eat proper and healthy food to be able to perform at their best level. But it is not just about eating right and enough, the diet part also has a lot to do with team building. With the national team we have to sit together for at least half an hour during every meal, even at breakfast. It improves players' focus and brings them closer.

You talk a lot about positive energy and respect...

The key to success is attitude. It is more important than talent. If you don't commit fully, it doesn't matter how skilful you are, you will not reach your maximum. I want my players to give everything in every training session and always show each other respect.

But you don't treat everybody the same way...

No, I treat players according to their personality, experience and knowledge. Some things must be the same for everyone for things to work, but I try to see every individual and act after his needs. That way I get the best out of him and the team.

What is it like having Zlatan Ibrahimovic in your team?

Everyone has an opinion about Zlatan but for me he is a fantastic player who can give us that little extra bit we need to win. And he is a fantastic person to have in the group. He has meant a lot to the young players.

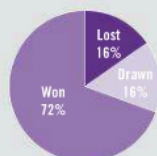


Through...Hamren (in scarf) and his staff hail the victory over Holland that put Sweden into the finals as the second-placed team with the best record

COACH'S RECORD



Sweden's defeat by England in November was Hamren's fourth as national coach. He has also lost to Denmark, Hungary and Holland.



P	W	D	L
25	18	4	4

How do you feel about Euro 2012?

I am very much looking forward to it. The support and interest in the country is huge. I was very pleased with the qualifying campaign as a whole. Sure, we had some weaker performances but we won eight out of 10 matches and there were only a few teams with more points than us.

The 4-1 defeat by Holland early in qualifying must have been quite an eye opener to you...

Yes, we learned a lot. We had been successful in the friendlies ahead of that game but afterwards we realised we had to make some changes. Sometimes we were too naive in possession, too attacking. Our full-backs were too wide and when we lost the ball Holland punished us. Against good opponents we are going to be punished if we don't

have the right balance and discipline when we attack.

How do you rate the win in Croatia in February?

That was a great performance and the things we had worked on turned out well. When we played Denmark and England in November we were organised but lacked energy and quality on the ball. Against Croatia we showed new courage in possession and gave each other positive energy. It was great to see.

What of your opponents in Group D?

France and England are the favourites. They have so many great players who can win matches for them and they might go through without even playing well. Ukraine is also a tough opponent. Looking at the tournament history, the host nations rarely lose their first game. It will be a huge challenge for us.

How far can you go?

We all have to be in top form, as individuals and as a team, in every game. We might play three great games and still not go through. Still, I dream of us in the Final. We want a medal. Of course it will be very difficult, but look at Denmark in 1992 and Greece in 2004. Why shouldn't we be able to pull off something like that?

Interview by Johanna Gara



Johan Elmander

“Under Erik we are not as wimpy as before, we dare more”

How is Erik Hamren's Sweden different to ex-coach Lagerback's?

With Lars Lagerback we were more defensive. We won many games 1-0 and were very consistent. Erik has more of a bounce-and-go mentality. He had to change his approach a bit after that setback in Holland, though. Now we are able to play well defensively as well. We play higher on the pitch, press more and try to win back the ball quickly. We are not as wimpy as before, we dare more. Now we can adapt our style according to the opponents but without abandoning our philosophy.

They also have different personalities...

Yes, Erik is open and talks a lot. Lagerback was more reserved; some people said he was boring. Erik focuses on the big picture, for example what we eat, and wants a strong and cohesive group where everyone should feel comfortable to talk and give critique.

Are Sweden a better team now?

That's a difficult question. We had some fantastic players in Fredrik Ljungberg and Henrik Larsson, but now we have a good mix of experience and youth. I guess we will have to see after the Euros if we are better now.

What of Sweden's group?

It's difficult but not impossible. The first

game against Ukraine is the key game for us. They are on paper the worst team in the group. Sure, it is their home ground, but if we can go 1-0 up there will be a lot of pressure on them and their defence might crack when they push forward. Host nations usually do well but trends are there to be broken. I prefer to play them first.

And the other two opponents?

England and France are out for revenge for earlier failures. France has not had a good championship in many years but Laurent Blanc seems to have sorted out a lot of the problems and they haven't lost in a long time. I am sure the players want to prove themselves after what happened in South Africa. If everything falls into place they can go very far in the tournament. When you look at England it feels like they have a good team and can be a positive surprise. I'm only too glad that Wayne Rooney can't play against us. He is in great form and their key player.

What can give Sweden the edge?

Being the underdogs suits us perfectly. We showed against Croatia in February that we can play really well and we are very confident going into the tournament. We usually perform on top against better teams. We have a good record against England and we know Ukraine really well.

Because of your versatility you have been placed on the wing a lot. How do you feel about that?

I prefer to play in the centre, but I am always proud to represent Sweden, no matter where I play.

What's it like playing alongside Zlatan Ibrahimovic?

Sometimes it's difficult to know what he is going to do and then, all of a sudden, you have the ball at your feet. He takes a lot of responsibility on the pitch and is a fantastic passer, not just a goalscorer. He looks stronger than ever. Against Croatia he played as the No10 while I was the sole striker and we found each other in a way which we have only managed a few times before. It looked very interesting.

Are you in your best form ever?

Maybe. During the last year-and-a-half I have been able to show what I am capable of. I believe in myself and that self-confidence makes me calm. I don't get stressed if I have one bad game. I owe a lot to Owen Coyle who took over at Bolton from Gary Megson, who over a long period had broken me down.

Who will win Euro 2012?

Germany. They are always strong and it feels like it is their turn. Spain play beautiful football but some time the success has to end for them.

Interview by Johanna Gara

THE VIEW FROM SWEDEN



“For the first time in decades, Sweden will travel to a big tournament with many attacking options and a vulnerable defence. Erik Hamren will use a 4-2-3-1 formation and the big question is whether Zlatan Ibrahimovic will play up front or just behind another forward. It's probably a different Sweden than many are used to, but the result will be the same: runners-up in the group stage and then bye-bye in the quarter-finals”

Jonas Dahlquist, Canal+

“If Zlatan Ibrahimovic can conserve the great form he has shown at Milan this season Sweden will advance from the group. I want to see him in the No10 position where he can steer the attack the way he does at his club. But since the probable opponent in the quarter-finals will be Spain the tournament will end there for Sweden”

Johanna Reimers, Expressen



“Sweden has gone from being Europe's most reliable, defensive tacticians to being...something quite different. A bit sexier, perhaps, but not as reliable. On their – and Zlatan Ibrahimovic's – day, they can still compete with pretty much anyone, but I can't say I expect those days to be too frequent this summer. Sweden might make it through the group stage. Anything beyond would be a major upset”

Simon Bank, Aftonbladet

GOALKEEPERS



Par HANSSON

Age 25 (22.06.86)
Helsingborg
QR: 0 games
Third choice for the national side, he was Helsingborg's best player when they won the Swedish league last season. During the derby game he was hit on the head by a Malmö fan who ran onto the pitch.



Andreas ISAKSSON

Age 30 (03.10.81)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
QR: 9 games/0 goals
This will be his fifth big tournament, and fourth as first choice. Tall, good on his line but weak with his feet. Once of Manchester City, he conceded eight goals in his last game for the English club.



Johan WILAND

Age 31 (24.01.81)
Copenhagen (Den)
QR: 2 games/0 goals
A late bloomer who has done well at Copenhagen, especially in the Champions League last season, when Barcelona's players praised him. Confident and calm, with quick reflexes, but suspect in the air.

COACH

Erik HAMREN

Age 54 (27.06.57)
Sweden coach since November 2009

Replaced Lars Lagerback, who resigned when Sweden failed to qualify for the 2010 World Cup. For a year he continued in a dual role, coaching both Rosenborg and Sweden, until dropping his club commitments in November 2010. He had taken Rosenborg to the Norwegian league title for the previous two seasons. Prior to that he won the Danish championship with Aalborg, having earlier coached Swedish top-flight clubs AIK and Örgryte.



DEFENDERS



Mikael ANTONSSON

Age 30 (31.05.81)
Bologna (Ita)
QR: 1 game/0 goals
Moved to Italy last summer from Copenhagen and has had a great season. A strong centre-back who reads the game well but has had a lot of injuries during his career.



Andreas GRANQVIST

Age 27 (16.04.85)
Genoa (Ita)
QR: 5 games/2 goals
A tall centre-back who competes with Jonas Olsson for a place in the starting line-up. Did well when tried as a right-back against Croatia in February. Moved to Serie A from Dutch side Groningen last summer.



Mikael LUSTIG

Age 25 (13.12.86)
Celtic (Sco)
QR: 10 games/1 goal
A quick, attacking right-back, he played every minute in qualifying but has been injury prone since his January move from Rosenborg to Celtic. He has had some problems with his positioning.



Olof MELLBERG

Age 34 (03.09.77)
Olympiakos (Gre)
QR: 6 games/0 goals
Set to play in his sixth major finals, he has had a solid season in Greece, winning the Super League title. Quick, good with his head and has a winner's attitude.



Jonas OLSSON

Age 29 (10.03.83)
West Bromwich Albion (Eng)
QR: 0 games
With Daniel Majstorovic out injured, he looks the preferred choice in the middle. He lacks international experience but has plenty from the Premier League. Aggressive, with a decent left foot.

MIDFIELDERS



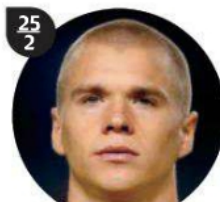
Emir BAJRAMI

Age 24 (07.03.88)
Twente (Hol)
QR: 6 games/1 goal
A quick and intuitive dribbler on the left flank. One of the few to make the step up from the under-21s to the senior side. A drop in form this season has seen him lose his place in the starting line-up.



Rasmus ELM

Age 24 (17.03.88)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol)
QR: 5 games/0 goals
Free-kick specialist who has had a good season in Holland. Versatile, with good vision and precise passing, he links up well with Ibrahimovic. His two older brothers also play professionally.



Samuel HOLMEN

Age 27 (28.06.84)
Istanbul BB (Tur)
QR: 0 games
A starter under ex-coach Lars Lagerback but has not fully convinced Erik Hamren yet. Aggressive, creative and technical box-to-box player with two good feet and great stamina.



Kim KALLSTRÖM

Age 29 (24.08.82)
Lyon (Fra)
QR: 10 games/3 goals
The engine of the central midfield. Not the quickest but a hard worker who has a good left foot and takes many of the set-pieces. Had the most assists – seven – during the qualifying campaign.



Sebastian LARSSON

Age 26 (06.06.85)
Sunderland (Eng)
QR: 10 games/3 goals
Hard working with good passing ability, he takes corners and free-kicks. Six assists in the qualifying campaign. Has been tried as a right-back but does not want to play there.

FORWARDS



Johan ELMANDER

Age 30 (27.05.81)
Galatasaray (Tur)
QR: 10 games/2 goals
Quick and mobile, he is at his best in the centre but has also played on the right. Always encourages his team-mates. Has had a good first season in Turkey. His grandmother is German.



John GUIDETTI

Age 20 (15.04.92)
Manchester City (Eng)
QR: 0 games
Made his debut against Croatia in February after a great season on loan to Feyenoord. A fitness fanatic who does extra training every day. Grew up in Kenya where his dad was a teacher.



Tobias HYSEN

Age 30 (09.03.82)
Gothenburg
QR: 2 games/1 goal
Quick, counter-attacking player who is confident in front of the goal. Played a season with Sunderland in the Championship. His dad Glenn played three seasons in central defence for Liverpool.



Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC

Age 30 (03.10.81)
Milan (Ita)
QR: 8 games/5 goals
Probably in the best form of his life. Strong and technically good, with great vision and a powerful shot. His temperament can be a problem. His biography was the biggest selling book in Sweden last year.



Ola TOIVONEN

Age 25 (03.07.86)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
QR: 9 games/2 goals
A creative centre-forward, a neat passer and finisher who is also good in the air. Behind Ibrahimovic and Elmander in the pecking order, so will probably have to do with a place on the bench.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Ibrahimovic set to get more involved and play behind a lone striker

Sweden are a well-organised side who play on the counter and have improved their passing game under Hamren, who prefers a 4-2-3-1 formation, with attacking full-backs, which can turn into 4-4-1-1 against stronger teams.

In Larsson, Kallstrom and Rasmus Elm, Sweden will have some of the tournament's best free-kick takers, while Elm's long throw-ins can also be a dangerous weapon.

One problem Hamren has had is finding



4-2-3-1



8
4

Martin OLSSON

Age 23 (17.05.88)

Blackburn Rovers (Eng)

QR: 4 games/2 goals

A quick and attacking left-back, he has made Sweden's problem position his own. Scored four goals in his first six games for the national team. His sister is married to NBA star Dirk Nowitzki.



23
0

Behrang SAFARI

Age 27 (09.02.85)

Anderlecht (Bel)

QR: 3 games/0 goals

Was Hamren's preferred left-back early in the qualifying campaign but lost his place after a poor game away to Holland. Attacking, very left-footed and hits more crosses than Martin Olsson.



126
18

Anders SVENSSON

Age 35 (17.07.76)

Elfsborg

QR: 8 games/0 goals

Veteran central midfielder with good vision, he dictates the play from the back. Was given the nickname "Taco" after the Mexican dish, his favourite food.



21
2

Pontus WERNBLOOM

Age 25 (25.06.86)

CSKA Moscow (Rus)

QR: 8 games/2 goals

An aggressive central midfielder who Spanish paper *Marca* described as "tougher than Chuck Norris" after CSKA played Real Madrid in the Champions League.



72
8

Christian WILHELMSSON

Age 32 (08.12.79)

Al Hilal (Sau)

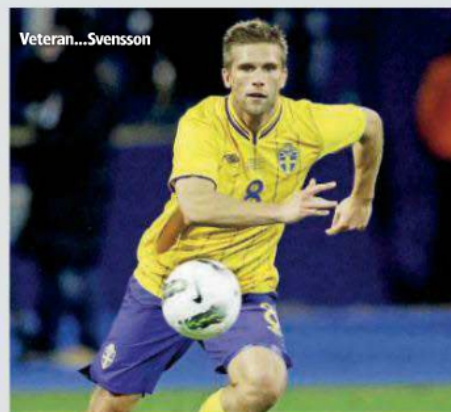
QR: 4 games/3 goals

A creative winger who played in Sweden, Norway, Belgium, France, Italy, England, Spain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar during his career. He is known by his nickname "Chippen" in Sweden.

a solution to the fact that Ibrahimovic has often become isolated when playing up front on his own against good sides. Against Croatia, in February, the coach tried using his captain in a deeper position than usual, sitting behind Elmander, and Sweden won 3-1 with Ibrahimovic scoring one goal and setting up two for Larsson.

The main selection questions concern the right-back slot and the role of central defensive midfielder. Will Lustig, who has been injured and out of form this season, start on the right or will Hamren risk playing centre-back Granqvist there? The 35-year-old Svensson looks likely to start next to Kallstrom in midfield, but he could be challenged by Wernbloom.

Johanna Gara



Veteran...Svensson

ALSO IN CONTENTION

GOALKEEPER

Johan DAHLIN

Age 25 (08.09.86)

Malmö

Caps 3 (0 goals)

QR: 0 games

Had the highest save percentage - 82 per cent - in the Swedish league last season. Injury prone.

DEFENDERS

Michael ALMEBACK

Age 24 (04.04.88)

Club Brugge (Bel)

Caps 4 (0 goals)

QR: 0 games

Strong, quick central defender in his first season outside Sweden.

Oscar WENDT

Age 26 (24.10.85)

Borussia M'gladbach (Ger)

Caps 18 (0 goals)

QR: 5 games/0 goals

Left-back who was the scapegoat after Sweden's loss to Hungary.

MIDFIELDERS

Albin EKDAL

Age 22 (28.07.89)

Cagliari (Ita)

Caps 0

Has broken through in Serie A this season.

Viktor ELM

Age 26 (13.11.85)

Heerenveen (Hol)

Caps 10 (0 goals)

QR: 0 games

Older brother of Rasmus Elm. Was a regular squad member but has not convinced Hamren.

Oskar HILJEMARK

Age 19 (28.06.92)

Elfsborg

Caps 2 (1 goal)

QR: 0 games

Made his debut in January, but is one for the future. Turned down offers from Club Brugge and Genoa last year.

FORWARDS

Marcus BERG

Age 25 (17.08.86)

Hamburg (Ger)

Caps 19 (5 goals)

QR: 2 games/1 goal

Struggled with injuries and now back in Germany after being at PSV Eindhoven on loan.

Markus ROSENBERG

Age 29 (27.09.82)

Werder Bremen (Ger)

Caps 30 (6 goals)

QR: 0 games

Has enjoyed a good season in the Bundesliga.

Committed...Ukraine defender
Yevhen Selin (in yellow) competes
with Marc Janko of Austria



UKRAINE Seeking a miracle

Injuries and squabbles have hampered the co-hosts' chances



OLEG ZADERNOVSKY
in Kiev

Few will envy the task facing Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin who, in the build-up to Euro 2012 on home soil, must draw on his reserves of character following a string of injuries and arguments between leading players. And these problems existed long before the appointment of the man who is still much admired for the heroics his side performed at the 2006 World Cup by reaching the quarter-finals.

In February 2010, Myron Markevych – the vastly experienced manager of Metalist Kharkiv – took the reigns of the national side and was in charge for four friendly games: wins over Lithuania (4-0), Romania (3-2) and Norway (1-0), plus a commendable 1-1 draw with Holland. But Markevych was forced to quit following a bribery scandal at his club, where he remained in charge while also coaching the national team.

Next the Football Federation of Ukraine turned to Yuri Kalitvintsev, a star of the Dynamo Kiev team of the 1990s. But during his seven months as caretaker, Ukraine registered only one win (2-1 against Chile), five draws and two defeats (by Brazil and Italy, both 2-0). However, Kalitvintsev, who guided Ukraine to the European Under-19 title in 2009, was still considered a strong candidate for the full-time post, along with under-21s coach Pavel Yakovenko.

Instead, the unemployed Blokhin won a majority of the votes at a federation executive committee, mainly due to his ability to keep his head in a crisis. "I'm neither a dreamer nor a madman in football terms," he said. "I'm aware

that the head coach is always responsible for the result. That's doubly important with Ukraine co-hosting Euro 2012."

Blokhin undertook numerous experiments in friendly games, reshuffling the starting line-up every match. After an opening 2-0 win over Uzbekistan, a disastrous series of four defeats followed, including two against future Euro 2012 group rivals France (4-1) and Sweden (1-0). "We weren't too bad in either game," argued Blokhin at the time. "We were rather unlucky. I think we need to go to church to change our bad luck."

Critical moment

It is hard to pinpoint what changed, but in the next five friendlies Ukraine won three and drew twice, including a 3-3 thriller with Germany in the inaugural match at the Olimpiyskiy stadium in Kiev. "It was a special, probably a critical moment," said Blokhin. "We proved to ourselves that we could play with the biggest sides in Europe on equal terms."

Unfortunately for the coach, the unity he worked so hard to build was in danger of disappearing in April when a vital league game between Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kiev ended in acrimony. Shakhtar won 2-0 but the game was marred by serious mistakes by referee Yiri Vaks.

Dynamo and Ukraine midfielder Denys Harmash was wrongly shown a second yellow card (later rescinded) in an incident which helped to create a spirit of animosity between two clubs who will supply the bulk of players for the Euro 2012 squad. Shakhtar defender

GROUP

11.06.12	Sweden (Kiev, Ukr))
15.06.12	France (Donetsk, Ukr)
19.06.12	England (Donetsk, Ukr)

Yaroslav Rakytyskyi claimed that Dynamo skipper Oleksandr Shovkovskiy verbally abused him in the tunnel after the game.

"Shovkovskiy insulted my city, my president, my coach, and my team-mates," claimed Rakytyskyi. "How can we play in the same team for Ukraine? He must apologise."

Shovkovskiy was quick to hit back, saying: "Only players who have been in the national side many years can make claims against me. For the ones who invented reasons not to play for the national team [Rakytyskyi left the training camp, claiming that he was injured ahead of a friendly against Sweden] it's better to think about his own reputation."

Blokhin has little time to repair the damage and has not been helped by the injury that has ruled out goalkeeper Andriy Dikan, of Spartak Moscow. In addition, Shakhtar's key central defender Dmytro Chygrynskiy has been struggling with injuries and is yet to make a full recovery, while there are ongoing concerns over the health of veteran star Andriy Shevchenko. The situation could be further complicated if Shakhtar and Dynamo are forced into a play-off for the title.

Blokhin is strong-willed but it remains to be seen if he can overcome the obstacles facing the squad and repeat the miracle of 2006. **WS**

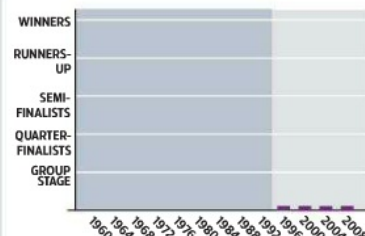
BASE CAMP



Ukraine will be staying and training at Dynamo Kiev's training complex at Koncha-Zaspa, 18 miles from Kiev, where Sweden will also complete their preparations.

EURO RECORD

1960-1992 part of Soviet Union



FRIENDLIES 2012

29.02.12	Israel (a)	3-2
28.05.12	Estonia (in Austria)	
01.06.12	Austria (a)	
05.06.12	Turkey (venue tbc)	

Oleg Blokhin

“Foreign players occupy key roles at our top clubs so it’s not only making my job very difficult but also slowing down development of our promising talent”

How do you compare preparations for Euro 2012 with those before the World Cup in 2006?

I have to assume my players are prepared better than in 2006. I think the general quality of the players is better. Of course we have some problematic positions, particularly in the centre of defence, but I have to rely on those available. I doubt that anyone unexpected will appear on the horizon.

What’s special about your team in football terms?

We have quite a number of quick players, especially on the flanks, where both Dynamo Kiev wingers, Oleg Husiev and Andriy Yarmolenko, can create dangerous opportunities. They are very well equipped and prepared for the sort of attacking movements that may give us a cutting edge.

What is the side’s strength?

We are a very young side with great motivation. Most of the players have not won anything yet, so they would like to use such a great chance to show what they can do.

What has been your biggest problem so far?

Unfortunately the reality of current Ukrainian football is that foreigners occupy key roles at the top clubs.

That is not only making my job very difficult but it’s also slowing down the development of promising young talent. Moreover, our top four clubs [Dynamo Kiev, Shakhtar, Metalist and Dnipro] play different styles of football. I need to readjust their players for the needs of the national team and make them into a solid, unified team.

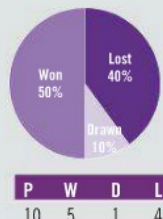
What is your selection policy?

It’s easy. A candidate for the national side must be a first-choice player at his club. It’s obligatory. For example, I have to travel to Moscow to clear up the situation with Andriy Voronin, who has suddenly found himself on the bench at Dynamo Moscow. I’m not going to include players just because they have had glory in the past. All of my footballers must show their potential in training and confirm it on the pitch.

COACH’S RECORD



Blokhin is in his second spell, having previously been in charge from 2003 to 2007, when his record was P46 W21 D14 L11.



How far away are you from finalising the squad?

I’m ready with 80 per cent of my list but the start of the tournament is getting ever closer. I drove past the giant clock on Kreschatik Street [the central avenue in Kiev] and saw the numbers counting down to Euro 2012 and realised we have to do something special to withstand the great challenges we will face.

Who are your favourites to win the tournament?

Everyone has to think they have a chance. I believe France will surprise people. They have done a lot of work after their big failure at the 2010 World Cup. The same can be applied to Italy. To the list of favourites I can easily add Germany and Portugal.

What about your group rivals?

I’ve mentioned France, but England are definitely a strong side, composed of top-quality players from the Premier League. Sweden are a physically well-prepared team who will not be easy opponents in a tough group.

The team was shocked by the terrible injury to goalkeeper Andriy Dikan...

Yes. Really, all of us were so upset and we hope he recovers as soon as possible. At least we have experienced keepers in Oleksandr Shovkovskiy and Andriy Pyatov.

How can Euro 2012 change football in the country?

First of all we have beautiful stadiums. They are simply perfect for both the players and the spectators. I think everything that the country has built for the purposes of Euro 2012, especially in football terms, will speed up the progress of Ukrainian football.

What is your dream for Euro 2012?

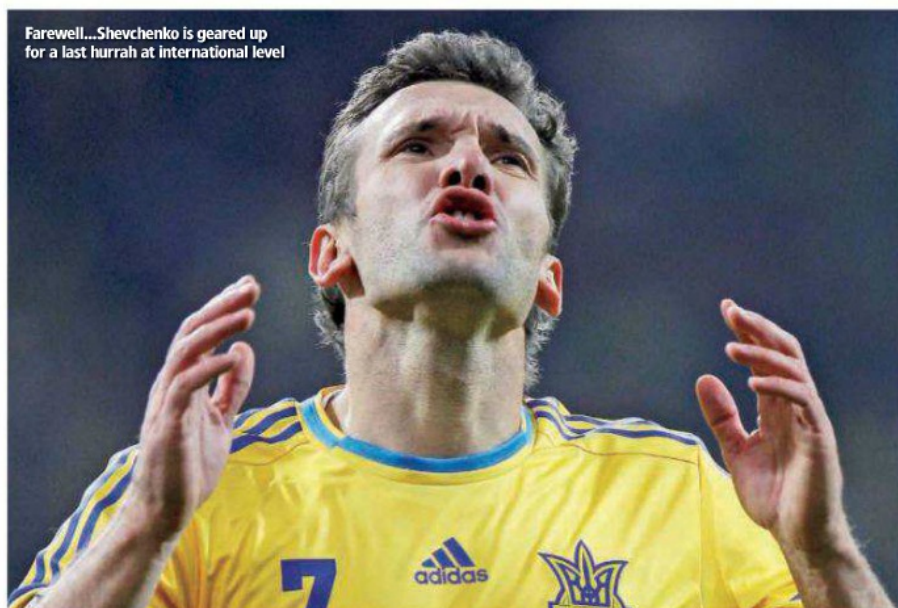
I always try to win. I think it is not good when someone in sport, and in football in particular, does not strive for perfection. I require the same from my players. Our specific task is to qualify from the group. This is our obligation. Let’s reach this target first and then we shall see. Our approach to the biggest tournament on our soil is to move on a step-by-step basis.

Interview by Oleg Zadernovsky



Expectation...Blokhin is under pressure to reach the quarter-finals

Farewell...Shevchenko is geared up for a last hurrah at international level



Andriy Shevchenko

“It’s my dream, my last major tournament, but I won’t come near the pitch if I’m not ready”

What does Euro 2012 mean for you?

It is my dream. The last five years I have hardly thought about anything other than the European Championship that will come to my country. The stadiums are simply perfect and I’m sure the atmosphere during the greatest sporting event in Ukraine will correspond to the level of the tournament.

How has the country changed during these five years of preparation?

The Ukrainian people have invested heavily in building the modern airports and stadiums and other infrastructure. Look at the attendances in the Ukraine Premier League matches this spring. For example, in Kiev every game draws 50,000 to 60,000 fans. It is more than we’ve attracted to the Champions League games before the reconstruction of the Olimpiysky stadium. People can see when they visit the stadiums that they are very good in every aspect.

What is your personal target in relation to Euro 2012?

This is my last major tournament so I don’t want only to be included in the team, I would like to perform at my highest level. I won’t come near the pitch if I’m not ready. I’ll consult our coach, Oleg Blokhin on how I can be the most use to the team. I’ll do my utmost for the needs of our national side.

What about your club career?

I will make my final decision whether to continue at the end of Euro 2012. Truly, I don’t know what will happen. Maybe I will continue to play for Dynamo Kiev, maybe not. Now I’m fully concentrated on helping my club to win the Ukrainian Premier League. After that I’m going to help Ukraine at Euro 2012. That’s all I’m thinking about.

How strong will Ukraine be?

Euro 2012 is a special event for every Ukrainian – including me, of course. I have never participated in the European Championship, but I took part in the 2006 World Cup in Germany. It was unforgettable. I know how the atmosphere influenced the players. We have quite a large group of promising, ambitious and very talented players for whom it will be the first big tournament. They have trained hard to produce quality football this summer. I think we will be well balanced and ready to fight with every rival standing in our way.

You have a tricky group...

Yes, it’s one of the toughest. Both England and France are among the leaders of world football. Generally speaking all our rivals are very powerful in terms of an intensive and physical kind of football, including even France. They play very powerful football that resembles the English style. Sweden too

are very strong as nearly all of them are playing either in England or Italy. But I think the similarity of our rivals may ease our first task to qualify from the group.

What is the team’s strategy?

Every match will be of high importance for us. First of all we have to think only about our next game. We can think about some strategies only when we have six points. Anything can happen. Maybe we will draw the first match then win the next two, or win the first and lose the second. In any case, it is vital to start with victory against Sweden.

How far can you go?

First of all we have to be well prepared, both mentally and physically, for every game. My dream is to show our quality football and with a bit of luck progress to the Final. We understand that will be a difficult task, but at the same time you only get the one chance to make history.

Will Ukrainian fans be expecting too much from you?

I’m already 35 years old so I can’t play three games a week. It’s natural that I need more time for rehabilitation. In theory I can play three games but the fans expect from me the kind of football I performed 10 or 15 years ago. If I feel I’m not completely fit I simply don’t want to play and disappoint my supporters. Both Blokhin and I understand this.

Interview by Oleg Zadernovsky

THE VIEW FROM UKRAINE



“Reaching the quarter-finals would be a miracle. Again we have to expect something special from head coach Oleg Blokhin. We can keep our hopes alive but only if we beat Sweden in the first match. Otherwise we will not even qualify from the group”

Victor Leonenko, TV pundit and ex-Ukraine international

“The general public expects Ukraine to win the tournament, but it is far more realistic to expect progress to the quarter-finals. Anything below this level will be a failure. To reach the last eight Blokhin must use his motivational skills and rely on incredible home support. Only that will compensate for the average level of the team and a lack of real stars”

Dmytro Shapoval, Komanda sports weekly



“We are definitely in a ‘group of death’. I’m sure all the teams will drop points and nothing will be decided until the final moment. Unfortunately, Ukraine is not well balanced. I can only think of five players who can be considered first choices:

goalkeeper Shovkovskiy, defender Rakytskyi, holding midfielder Tymoshchuk and wingers Husiev and Yarmolenko. That may not be enough to compete with difficult and experienced opponents”

Oleg Salenko, TV pundit and former Dynamo Kiev star

GOALKEEPERS

Maksym KOVAL

Age 19 (09.12.92)
Dynamo Kiev
 Promising graduate of Metalurh Zaporizhzhia's youth academy. Made his Ukraine Premier League debut in 2009, aged 17. Recruited by Dynamo last season after saving a penalty from Artem Milevskiy.


Andriy PYATOV

Age 27 (28.06.84)
Shakhtar Donetsk
 Lost his place at Shakhtar to Oleksandr Rybka last season but regained his status when his rival was suspended for two years after failing a drugs test. Signed from Vorskla Poltava in 2007.


Oleksandr SHOVKOVSKIY

Age 37 (02.01.75)
Dynamo Kiev
 Vastly experienced veteran who has stayed loyal to Dynamo throughout his career. An excellent penalty stopper, he was Ukraine's first choice at the 2006 World Cup. His wife, Alyona, is a well-known fashion designer.

COACH
Oleg BLOKHIN

Age 59 (05.11.52)
Ukraine coach since April 2011
 Former striker with Dynamo Kiev and the USSR, in 1975 he became the first Ukrainian to be named European Footballer of the Year. Began his coaching career in Greek club football before taking charge of Ukraine's national side for the first time in September 2003. Took them to the quarter-finals of the 2006 World Cup, but stepped down in December 2007 after failing to qualify for Euro 2008. Returned to the hot seat three years later when succeeding caretaker boss Yuriy Kalitvintsev.


DEFENDERS

Bohdan BUTKO

Age 21 (13.01.91)
Shakhtar Donetsk
 Promising right-back who failed to make the breakthrough at Shakhtar and was loaned to Volyn Lutsk and now Illichivets Mariupol. A European Under-19 winner in 2009.


Dmytro CHYGRYSKYI

Age 25 (07.11.86)
Shakhtar Donetsk
 Centre-back who spent a season with Barcelona before returning to Shakhtar in July 2010. Has still not fully recovered after a series of serious injuries.


Artem FEDETSKYI

Age 27 (26.04.85)
Karpaty Lviv
 Tireless right-back signed by Shakhtar in 2001 but loaned to various clubs before settling with Karpaty Lviv in 2009. His father, Andriy, is a well-known Ukraine player from the 1980s.


Yevhen KHACHERIDI

Age 24 (28.07.87)
Dynamo Kiev
 Central defender of Greek descent. Earned his first cap for Ukraine in 2009 in a 1-0 World Cup qualifying win over England. Notoriously bad tempered, he has been fined on numerous occasions by his club for poor behaviour on the field.


Oleksandr KUCHER

Age 29 (22.10.82)
Shakhtar Donetsk
 Centre-back who was born in Kiev but has made a good career in Donetsk with Shakhtar, where he has won three league titles and the 2009 UEFA Cup.

MIDFIELDERS

Oleksandr ALIYEV

Age 27 (03.02.85)
Dynamo Kiev
 Skilful, attacking midfielder blessed with arguably the strongest shot in the Ukrainian league. Moved to Lokomotiv Moscow in 2010 but returned to Dynamo last year where he has a key role.


Denys HARMASH

Age 22 (19.04.90)
Dynamo Kiev
 Aggressive holding midfielder who graduated from the Dynamo academy. Fearless in the tackle and a quick thinker when going forward. A Euro Under-19 winner in 2009.


Oleg HUSIEV

Age 29 (25.04.83)
Dynamo Kiev
 Pacy right-winger who has maintained a high level both for club and country since 2003. Scored the winning goal against Switzerland in the penalty shoot-out that paved the way to the 2006 World Cup quarter-finals.


Yevhen KONOPLYANKA

Age 22 (29.09.89)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk
 Skilful, speedy midfielder with great potential. Made his league debut for Dnipro in 2007 at the age of 18. Blessed with fine individual skills and a powerful shot.


Serhiy NAZARENKO

Age 32 (16.02.80)
Tavriya Simferopol
 Attacking midfielder or winger who is third in the national team's all-time goalscoring list, behind Shevchenko (46) and Serhiy Rebrov (15). Joined Tavriya from Dnipro last year.

FORWARDS

Marko DEVIC

Age 28 (27.10.83)
Metallist Kharkiv
 Serbia-born striker who received Ukrainian citizenship in 2008 after a good spell with Metallist. Prior to that he was a journeyman with a host of clubs. Aggressive and not particularly skilful. Ukrainian league top scorer in 2007-08.


Artem MILEVSKIY

Age 27 (12.01.85)
Dynamo Kiev
 Belarus-born forward who changed his citizenship to Ukrainian as a teenager. In addition to his scoring skills, he is a good creator. Follower of everything Italian made, including Maserati sports cars.


Andriy SHEVCHENKO

Age 35 (29.09.76)
Dynamo Kiev
 Veteran star forward who has battled in recent years after a back injury. Still a player who can produce a magical moment and change the course of a game. A clear leader in the dressing room.


Andriy VORONIN

Age 32 (21.07.79)
Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
 Moved to Germany as a teen and played for Monchengladbach, Mainz and Cologne before enjoying three prolific years at Bayern Leverkusen. Failed to make an impact in England with Liverpool.


Andriy YARMOLENKO

Age 22 (23.10.89)
Dynamo Kiev
 Born in Russia but moved with his Ukrainian parents back to their native country in the early 1990s. Hailed as the new Shevchenko when he graduated from the Dynamo academy. A powerful left-winger or forward.

TACTICS



First kit



Second kit

Campaign of friendlies yet to determine Blokhin's starting line-up

Since his appointment, Blokhin has used 41 players in 10 friendlies and he has tried numerous tactical line-ups. But, so far, he has failed to find a blend that meets his requirements.

As a rule, he prefers 4-5-1 or a conventional 4-4-2 formation. The facial injury Spartak Moscow's Andriy Dikan suffered in a Russian league game makes him unavailable for the finals, so Shovkovskiy will start in goal.

In defence there is still no fixed pair of



Taras MYKHALYK

Age 28 (28.10.83)
Dynamo Kiev

Injury-prone central defender. Late developer who started at CSKA Kiev and made the breakthrough after joining Dynamo in 2005. He enjoys fishing and hunting in his spare time.



Yevhen SELIN

Age 23 (09.05.88)
Vorskla Poltava

Powerful left-sided defender given his debut by Blokhin. Left home aged 12 to join the Stal Alchevsk academy and struggled at Metalist Kharkiv before establishing himself at Vorskla, who he joined in 2010.



Yaroslav RAKYTSKYI

Age 22 (03.08.89)
Shakhtar Donetsk

Powerful central defender or midfielder who has excelled since being promoted from his club's academy to the first team following the departure of Chygrynskiy to Barcelona in 2010.



Ruslan ROTAN

Age 30 (29.10.81)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk

Made his name with Dnipro and signed by Dynamo Kiev for £3.2m in 2005. After winning two Ukraine titles with Dynamo he returned to Dnipro in 2008. An inventive central midfielder and master of quality free-kicks.



Anatoliy TYMOSHCHUK

Age 33 (30.03.79)
Bayern Munich (Ger)

The heart and soul of the side, he had 10 years at Shakhtar before joining Zenit for £12.5m in 2007. Justified the fee by playing a key role in their 2008 UEFA Cup win. Moved to Bayern Munich in 2009.

centre-backs. It looks like Blokhin will rely on Kucher and Chygrynskiy, although he could bring in Mykhalyk or the towering Khacheridi.

In midfield, six or seven players are battling for the four or five places. The one exception is the defensively-minded Tymoshchuk, who is irreplaceable in the holding role. Blokhin has still to decide who will support him.

Yarmolenko on the left and speedy Husiev on the right are top-quality wingers. Shevchenko has the chance to be used in a supportive role in a 4-4-1-1 alternative, with Milevskiy a target man.

Oleg Zadernovsky

Quality...Yarmolenko



ALSO IN CONTENTION

DEFENDERS

Vitaly MANDZYUK

Age 26 (24.01.86)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk

Caps 18 (0 goals)
Right-side defender who made his international debut in 2008. Won two Ukraine titles with Dynamo Kiev before joining Dnipro in 2010.

Vyacheslav SHEVCHUK

Age 32 (13.05.79)
Shakhtar Donetsk

Caps 20 (0 goals)
Energetic left-back who has a phobia of lifts.

Taras STEPANENKO

Age 22 (08.08.89)
Shakhtar Donetsk

Caps 4 (0 goals)
Centre-back blessed with good positional sense.

MIDFIELDERS

EDMAR

Age 31 (16.06.80)
Metalist Kharkiv

Caps 1 (0 goals)
Battling holding midfielder with a typical Brazilian touch.

Olexiy HAI

Age 29 (06.11.82)
Shakhtar Donetsk

Caps 29 (1 goal)
Physically strong but inconsistent.

Maksym KALYNCHENKO

Age 33 (26.01.79)
Tavriya Simferopol

Caps 47 (7 goals)
Free-kick expert.

Serhiy KRAVCHENKO

Age 29 (24.04.83)
Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk

Caps 9 (1 goal)
Can orchestrate the game from midfield but too slow.

FORWARDS

Roman BEZUS

Vorskla Poltava

Age 21 (26.09.90)

Caps 1 (0 goals)

Speedy and inventive attacker.

Yevhen SELEZNYOV

Age 26 (20.07.85)
Shakhtar Donetsk

Caps 27 (5 goals)
Powerful but straightforward.

Anton SHINDER

Age 24 (13.06.87)
Tavriya Simferopol

Caps 1 (0 goals)
Tall and aggressive but poor with the ball.

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Heading for Munich...Chelsea's Didier Drogba rises above Sergio Busquets (right) and Javier Mascherano of Barcelona

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Spanish affair...Valencia (in black) and Atletico Madrid clash in the Europa League semi-finals

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Chelsea, Bayern meet in Munich Final



Unbelievable...Chelsea's Frank Lampard celebrates his side's draw in Camp Nou

After a most extraordinary sequence of events in the semi-finals, the 2012 Champions League Final will be between Chelsea and Bayern Munich in the Allianz Arena on May 19.

The much fabled Barcelona-Real Madrid Final, heralded as a showdown between the world's two best clubs, failed to materialise as the two leading Spanish clubs were dumped out of the competition: Barcelona by 10-man Chelsea, Madrid beaten on penalties by Bayern.

Defending champions Barcelona had been the favourites to reach the Final but came up against a spirited Chelsea side with a clear tactical game plan devised by caretaker manager Roberto Di Matteo.

Over the two legs, Di Matteo chose the same approach as Internazionale had successfully adopted against Barca in the 2010 semi-final. The Catalan side enjoyed the vast majority of possession, but a single chance, converted on the counter-attack

on the stroke of half-time by Didier Drogba, gave Chelsea a slender first-leg lead.

The odds were heavily stacked against Chelsea in the return, and increased when captain John Terry was sent off for kicking Alexis Sanchez. Barcelona quickly took a two-goal lead, but Ramires scored a wonderful reply for Chelsea, again on the counter just before half-time. Lionel Messi then missed a second-half penalty and it was left to Fernando Torres, derided for his loss of form since joining from Liverpool, to snatch a late equaliser to confirm a remarkable against-the-odds victory on aggregate.

Real Madrid had also looked well placed after their first leg against Bayern. Mario Gomez's last-minute goal had given the Germans a 2-1 victory in Munich but Madrid, who beat Barcelona at the weekend, appeared confident of going through.

Again, the Spanish side took an early two-goal lead, through two Cristiano Ronaldo goals, but again

their opponents fought back, with Arjen Robben converting a first-half penalty after Pepe had pushed Gomez.

Bayern gained strength as the match progressed and the strain of the weekend's *clasico* success appeared to take its toll on Madrid.

Madrid coach Jose Mourinho claimed that his side had practised penalties, but Ronaldo and Kaka, the world's two most expensive players, saw their spot-kicks saved by Manuel Neuer. Iker Casillas then denied Toni Kroos and Philipp Lahm, only for Sergio Ramos to send his shot way over the bar. That left Bastian Schweinsteiger to convert the penalty that sent Bayern into the Final in their home stadium – and deny Mourinho the chance of a third European title with a third club.

Difficult decisions

The fallout from Chelsea's back-to-the-wall performances was that key players will miss the Final after collecting bookings. Branislav Ivanovic, Ramires and Raul Meireles – along with Terry – will be banned for Chelsea, with David Alaba, Luis Gustavo and Holger Badstuber missing out for Bayern.

The Spanish *clasico* between Barcelona and Real Madrid at Camp Nou was sandwiched either side of the two Champions League semi-finals legs, but such fixture scheduling is unlikely to be

repeated next season. Both Barca and Madrid had to play three intense matches in the space of a week and three days, and after Barcelona's defeat by Chelsea an emotional Pep Guardiola announced he will take a sabbatical from Barca at the end of the season.

He will be replaced by his assistant Tito Vilanova after Barcelona's final game of the season, the Spanish Cup Final on May 25 against Athletic Bilbao.

Five of the eight teams in the Champions League and Europa League semi-finals were Spanish, a feat which matches West Germany's five in 1979.

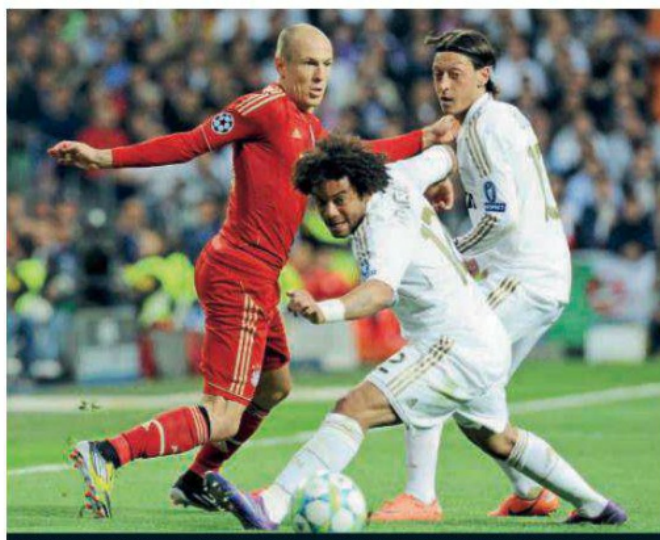
While Barca and Madrid missed out on Munich, the strength in depth of La Liga will be showcased by the Europa League Final, in which Atletico Madrid play Athletic Bilbao in Bucharest on May 9.

Atletico were comfortable winners over Valencia in an all-Spanish semi-final, while Marcelo Bielsa's exciting Athletic side saw off a spirited challenge from Sporting Lisbon to add to their impressive defeats of Manchester United and Schalke.

John Holmesdale



Break...Guardiola



Final surge...Bayern wide man Robben beats Real Madrid's Marcelo (centre) and Mesut Ozil

“



Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

The trouble with Harry

Harry for England? Or should it be Roy? Again one asks. Despite the recent eulogy of Harry Redknapp and his claims to the England managership by no less of an authority as Chairman Gartside of Bolton Wanderers. One does begin to wonder. For a good many weeks, the job appeared to be a shoo-in for Harry. Indeed by the time you read this he may even have got it. Popular demand has been loudly in his favour. He has seemed to want the job himself, just as Tottenham have been desperate to keep him.

Yet recent results and their implications have made one wonder, as the Tottenham "miracle" has steadily ebbed away. For many weeks it seemed that under Harry, Spurs had reached the promised land. They were going to come fourth, if not indeed third, in the Premier League, thus sailing into the next version of the European Champions Cup. Then things went suddenly and radically wrong. Culminating, you might say, in the shocking 5-1 defeat by Chelsea at Wembley in the FA Cup semi-final.

Yes, Chelsea scored their first goal through Didier Drogba against the run of the play. Yes, Chelsea's second goal was an outrage, an utterly inept if not an arrogant decision – what are linesmen for if not to consult in such circumstances – by the erratic Martin Atkinson. But five conceded goals cannot be brushed away merely on the basis of one appalling refereeing decision.

It seemed to me, watching at Wembley, that Harry had got things badly defensively wrong.

True he was without two resourceful centre backs in Dawson and Kaboul. But it became all too apparent, when Drogba brushed the hapless William Gallas aside to score Chelsea's first goal, that Gallas was a struggling veteran. To persist with that other veteran Ledley King, given the dire condition of knees which won't let him train, and put the vulnerable Gallas beside him was surely dicing with death and so it proved.

Keeping Gallas on the field for the whole of the game was almost an act of cruelty. Granted, Spurs had no recognised centre-back to take his place, but given his increasing immobility it would surely have made



Ebbing away...
Redknapp got it wrong

Harry is a highly effective club manager
....but international management is
wholly another ball game

some kind of sense just to replace him with a younger pair of legs.

For me, Harry is an accomplished and highly effective club manager, a whizz in the transfer market, an inspired wheeler and dealer, though I know he hates the nomenclature. But international management is wholly another ball game, and at least Roy Hodgson knows it well of old.

A remarkable evening

As Alex Ferguson remarked after Manchester United had somehow won a European Cup Final against Bayern Munich: "Football, bloody hell!"

Chelsea's astonishing achievement



Vital...Rooney

at Camp Nou will stand as one of the great surprises of football. The supreme anomaly being that while it was battling defence and moments of luck which kept them afloat, it was two superbly well-taken goals that equalled anything Barca and Messi could do. Terry's moment of idiocy, Ramires' stamina and finesse, plus the virtual rebirth of Torres. Some evening.

Surely Di Matteo now must stay.

A one-man team?

Meanwhile, any attempt to trumpet the Premier League as the best in the world is surely subverted by the poor performance of those at the top. Manchester United and Manchester City both flopped out of the European Champions Cup and both were humiliated, even in the half-baked Platini tournament into which they descended. United may have been making a valid bid for their 13th championship under Alex Ferguson, but their catastrophic collapse against Everton at Old Trafford, where a 4-2 advantage evaporated into a pitiful 4-4 draw, was hardly the stuff of champions.

Exhuming Paul Scholes at 37 in mid season showed all too plainly a team in trouble. Without Wayne Rooney and all those well-taken goals where would they have been? Can one man make a team? Well, take one man like Rooney out of a team and what would it be?

Reflecting on the same subject, what would all conquering Real Madrid have been without Di Stefano, Brazil without Pele (though they did win a World Cup largely without him in 1962), Holland and Ajax without Cruyff, West Germany and Bayern Munich without Franz Beckenbauer? But enough of that. **WS**



NEXT MONTH

● The full story from Munich and Bucharest on the 2012 Champions League and Europa League Finals

PLUS ● The fallout from the European club season, with every major league reviewed

JUNE ISSUE ON SALE JUNE 8

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE Appointments, sackings and loans



EUROPE

■ Ex-Liverpool defender **SAMI HYYPIÄ** and youth-team coach **SASCHA LEWANDOWSKI** were handed control of Bayer Leverkusen after the Bundesliga side dismissed Robin Dutt following the 2-0 defeat at home to Freiburg.

■ **IOAN ANDONE**, who led CFR Cluj to a domestic double in 2008, is back in charge of the Romanian league leaders for a second time. He replaced **JORGE COSTA**, who was sacked after a humiliating 5-0 home defeat by Rapid Bucharest cut their lead at the top of the table to five points.

■ Besiktas of Turkey replaced Portuguese coach Carlos Carvalhal with his predecessor **TAYFUR HAVUTCU** two days after they lost at home to Samsunspor.

■ **MICHAL HIPPI** and **STANISLAV GRIGA** were appointed joint-coaches of Slovakia's national team. Hipp had been interim boss since Vladimir Weiss quit in January, while Griga is in charge of top-flight side Senica.

■ Dutch coach **FRANS ADELAAR** replaced Lubomir Nosicky as coach of Slovak league leaders Zilina with six games of the season left. Nosicky was sacked after a 2-2 draw with mid-table Trencin.

■ Former boss **FRANK SCHAEFER** returned to take charge of Cologne when coach Stale Solbakken left the struggling Bundesliga club after a 4-0 defeat at Mainz.

■ Beroe coach **ILIAN ILIEV** will take charge of fellow Bulgarian club Levski Sofia next season.

■ Saudi Arabia captain **OSAMA HAWSAWI** has signed a two-year deal with Anderlecht. The 28-year-old defender joins the Belgian club from Al Hilal.

SOUTH AMERICA



Masked man...Sava

■ Former Fulham, Gimnasia and Celta Vigo striker **FACUNDO SAVA**, who is remembered for his "Mask of Zorro" goal celebrations, took up his first coaching position, replacing Dany Garnero in charge of Argentinian Primera Division side San Martin.

■ **LUIS ZUBELDIA** quit as coach of Ecuadorian club Barcelona and succeeded Alfio Basile at Racing after the Argentinian side's 4-1 defeat to Independiente in the clausura. **RICARDO CARUSO LOMBARDI**, who was coach of second-tier side Quilmes, took over from Leonardo Madelon at struggling San Lorenzo. The 50-year-old Caruso Lombardi is regarded as something of a specialist in fighting relegation, having saved Racing from the drop in 2009 and Tigre in 2010.

AFRICA

■ **JAMES KWESI APPIAH** is the new coach of Ghana, stepping up from the role of assistant to replace Goran Stevanovic, who was sacked in March.

■ Angola appointed **ROMEU FILEMON** of club side Primeiro de Agosto as interim national coach following the departure of Lito Vidigal.

■ **DONALD "ACE" KHUSE** was put in charge of Kaizer Chiefs for the last seven games of the South African season after Serbian coach Vladimir Vermezovic had his contract terminated. Former Mozambique coach **MART NOOIJ** took charge of strugglers Santos for the final five games.

ASIA

■ **ANGE POSTECOGLOU** was appointed Melbourne Victory coach two days after leaving A-League Grand Final winners Brisbane Roar. His long-time assistant **RADO VIDOSIC** was installed in his place at Brisbane.

■ Shanghai Shenhua have made **NICOLAS ANELKA** player-coach. The former France striker Anelka joined the Chinese Super League club from Chelsea in January.



Experience...Anelka

■ **MASANOBU MATSUNAMI** replaced Jose Carlos Serrao as coach of J.League side Gamba Osaka, with **KATSUSHI KAJII** – who was initially understood to be taking charge – becoming general manager. **YAHIRO KAZAMA** took over from Naoki Soma at Kawasaki Frontale after the three-time J.League runners-up took just seven points from their first five league games.

■ Al Sharjah of the UAE made **ABDULMAJEED AL NIMR** their fourth coach of the season.



Chance...Hyypia



Five to go...De Canio

De Canio is 18th Serie A change

Genoa made **LUIGI DE CANIO** the 18th coaching change in Serie A this season. He was appointed with five games to go when Alberto Malesani was sacked, after just three games back in charge, following a 4-1 defeat to Siena. Malesani started the season in charge at Genoa but was dismissed in December following a 6-1 loss at Napoli. The veteran coach was then reappointed following Pasquale Marino's removal in the wake of a 5-4 defeat at Internazionale.

OUT

EUROPE

The Euro hopes of Poland midfielder **SLAWOMIR PESZKO** ended when he was sanctioned by his German club Cologne following an alcohol-fuelled dispute with a taxi driver.

Having led Olympiakos to a second successive Super League title, **ERNESTO VALVERDE** will step down as coach of the Greek champions at the end of the season.

Spanish striker **RAUL** will not extend his contract with Schalke at the end of the season and will leave the Bundesliga club.

Liverpool director of football **DAMIEN COMOLLI** left the club by mutual consent.

French top-flight strugglers Brest sacked coach **ALEX DUPONT** five games before the end of the season.

SOUTH AMERICA

Palmeiras midfielder **WESLEY** is expected to be out for the rest of the year after injuring a knee in only his fourth appearance since joining the Brazilian club from Werder Bremen of Germany for £5million in March.

Universidad Catolica sacked coach **MARIO LEPE** after their elimination from the Libertadores Cup. Their Chilean rivals Colo Colo dismissed **IVO BASAY**.

CONCACAF

YOSMEL DE ARMAS, a 22-year-old defender with Cuban club Ciudad de La Habana, is seeking asylum after playing for his country in the USA in an Olympic qualifying tournament.

AFRICA

South African club Orlando Pirates parted company with coach **JULIO LEAL**, who had been suspended after claiming "he could not see his way forward" for the club.

ASIA

Sydney goalkeeper **LIAM REDDY** had his contract terminated for getting drunk on a flight to the team's A-League finals series game away to Wellington Phoenix.

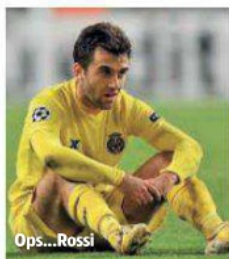


Retired... Al Qahtani

Saudi Arabia striker **YASSER AL QAHTANI** has retired from international football. The 29-year-old, who plays for Al Ain in the UAE, won 100 caps.

Rossi and Wilshere out of Euro

Villarreal and Italy striker **GIUSEPPE ROSSI** is to undergo two separate operations on his injured right knee and will be out of action until 2013. Arsenal's England midfielder **JACK WILSHERE** was ruled out of the Euro finals after failing to recover from a stress fracture to his right ankle.



Ops... Rossi

ESM TEAM OF THE MONTH

European Sports Media

MARCH 2012



Lukasz Piszczek
B Dortmund
Votes
●●●●●

Thomas Vermaelen
Arsenal
Votes
●●●●●

David De Gea
Man United
Votes
●●●●●

Mats Hummels
B Dortmund
Votes
●●●●●

Marcelo
Real Madrid
Votes
●●●●●

Xavi
Barcelona
Votes
●●●●●



Shinji Kagawa
B Dortmund
Votes
●●●●●

Arjen Robben
B Munich
Votes
●●●●●

Lionel Messi
Barcelona
Votes
●●●●●

Mario Gomez
B Munich
Votes
●●●●●

Cristiano Ronaldo
Real Madrid
Votes
●●●●●

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions.

ESM – EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

The members of ESM are:

A Bola (Portugal)
Elf (Holland)
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Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Germany)
Kicker (Germany)
Marca (Spain)
Sport/Foot (Belgium)
Sport Express (Russia)
De Telegraaf (Holland)
TIPSbladet (Denmark)
World Soccer (England)



ANDORRA

Debut for Lusitans

Lusitans won their first-ever Andorran championship on a dramatic final day of the season which began with just one point separating the top four teams.

A 2-1 victory over Sant Julia wrapped up the title for a club that was formed by Portuguese immigrants in 1999, and secured a

debut appearance in the first qualifying round of the Champions League.

"We are a humble club with a great following and we've been in the shadow of other top-flight sides for some time," said coach Vicenc Marques. "We made a big step forward this year."

"Imagining that we will be competing in the UEFA Champions League feels like a dream. It's as if we've

won the lottery. We feel privileged." Defending champions FC Santa Coloma finished second and will compete in the first qualifying round of next season's Europa League.



BELARUS

Quick-fire treble

Shakhtyor Soligorsk striker Dmitri Komarovski scored three times in five minutes

to register the fastest hat-trick in Belarusian Premier League history. He also grabbed a fourth as Shakhtyor beat Minsk 7-0.



BELGIUM

Charleroi return

A year after they were relegated, Charleroi won the Second Division title and were promoted back to the top flight.



Hat-trick hero...Komarovski

Club Results

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs

Mar 27

APOL Nicosia (Cyp) 0

Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Benzema 74, 90, Kaka 82)
HT: 0-0. Att: 22,385. Ref: Brych (Ger)

APOL Nicosia (Cyp) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Benzema 74, 90, Kaka 82)
HT: 0-0. Att: 22,385. Ref: Brych (Ger)

APOL Nicosia (Cyp) 0
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Benzema 74, 90, Kaka 82)
HT: 0-0. Att: 22,385. Ref: Brych (Ger)

Mar 27

Benfica (Por) 0

Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Kaluou 75)

HT: 0-0. Att: 60,830. Ref: Tagliavento (Ita)

Benfica (Por) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Kaluou 75)
HT: 0-0. Att: 60,830. Ref: Tagliavento (Ita)

Benfica (Por) 0
Chelsea (Eng) 1 (Kaluou 75)
HT: 0-0. Att: 60,830. Ref: Tagliavento (Ita)

Mar 28

Marselle (Fra) 0

Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Gomez 44, Robben 69)

HT: 0-1. Att: 31,683. Ref: Velasco Carballo (Spa)

Marselle (Fra) 0
Bayern Munich (Ger) 2 (Gomez 44, Robben 69)
HT: 0-1. Att: 31,683. Ref: Velasco Carballo (Spa)

Mar 28

Milan (Ita) 0

Barcelona (Spa) 0

Att: 76,169. Ref: Eriksson (Swe)

Milan (Ita) 0
Barcelona (Spa) 0
Att: 76,169. Ref: Eriksson (Swe)

Barcelona (Spa) 0
Milan (Ita) 0
Att: 76,169. Ref: Eriksson (Swe)

2nd legs

Apr 3

Barcelona 3 (Messi pen 11, pen 41, Iniesta 53)

Milan 1 (Nocerino 32)

HT: 2-1. Att: 94,629. Ref: Kuipers (Hol)

Barcelona 3-1 on agg

Barcelona: Valdes - Pique (Adriano 75), Mascherano, Puyol, Daniel Alves, Busquets, Xavi (Thiago 63), Iniesta, Messi, Fabregas (Keita 78), Cuenca.
Milan: Abbiati - Abate, Mexes, Nesta, Antonini, Nocerino, Ambrosini, Seedorf (Aquilani 61), Boateng (Alexandre Pato 69; Lopez 83), Robinho, Ibrahimovic.

Apr 3

Bayern Munich 2 (Olic 13, 37)

Marselle 0

HT: 2-0. Att: 66,000. Ref: Moen (Nor)

Bayern 4-0 on agg

Bayern: Neuer - Lahm, Boateng, Badstuber, Alaba,

Tymoshchuk, Luiz Gustavo, Muller (Rafinha 39),

Kroos (Pranjic 67), Ribery, Olic (Gomez 75).

Marselle: Mandanda - Azpilicueta, Fanni,

N'Koulou, Morel (Amalfitano 46), Mbila, Cheyrou,

Remy (Kabore 63), Valbuena, A Ayew, Brandao

(Gignac 74).

Apr 4

Real Madrid 2 (Lampard pen 21, Raul Meireles 90+2)

Benfica 1 (Javi Garcia 85)

HT: 1-0. Att: 37,264. Ref: Skomina (Sln)

Chelsea 3-1 on agg

Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, David Luiz, Terry (Cahill

60), Cole, Ramires, Mikel, Lampard, Mata (Raul

Meireles 79), Kalou, Fernando Torres (Drogba 88).

Benfica: Artur - Pereira, Javi Garcia, Emerson,

Capdevila, Witsel, Matic, Bruno Cesar (Rodrigo 72),

Almar, Gaitan (Yannick 61), Cardozo (Nelson

Oliveira 57). Sent off: Pereira 40min.

Apr 4

Real Madrid 5 (Cristiano Ronaldo 26, 75, Kaka 37,

Callejon 80, Di Maria 84)

APOL Nicosia 2 (Manduca 67, Solari pen 82)

HT: 2-0. Att: 54,627. Ref: Rocchi (Ita)

Real Madrid 8-2 on agg

Real Madrid: Casillas - Sergio Ramos, Pepe,

Varane, Marcelo (Callejon 46), Sahin, Granero

(Abilol 65), Altintop, Kaka, Cristiano Ronaldo,

Higuain (Di Maria 55).

APOL: Pardo - Poursaitidis, Paulo Jorge, Kaka,

Boaventura, Nuno Morais, Helio Pinto (Satsias 78),

Charalambides, Marcinho, Manduca (Adorno 68),

Aliton (Solari 70).

Semi-finals

1st legs

Apr 17

Bayern Munich 2 (Ribery 17, Gomez 90)

Real Madrid 1 (Ozil 53)

HT: 1-0. Att: 66,000. Ref: Webb (Eng)

Bayern: Neuer - Lahm, Boateng, Badstuber, Alaba,

Luiz Gustavo, Schweinsteiger (Muller 61), Robben,

Kroos, Ribery, Gomez.

Real Madrid: Casillas - Arbeloa, Pepe, Sergio

Ramos, Fabio Coentrão, Khedira, Xabi Alonso,

Di Maria (Granero 79), Ozil (Marcelo 69),

Cristiano Ronaldo, Benzema (Higuain 84).

Apr 18

Chelsea 1 (Drogba 45+2)

Barcelona 0

HT: 1-0. Att: 38,039. Ref: Brych (Ger)

Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, Cahill, Terry, Cole, Mikel,

Lampard, Raul Meireles, Mata (Kaluou 74), Ramires

(Bosingwa 88), Drogba.

Barcelona: Valdes - Daniel Alves, Puyol,

Mascherano, Adriano, Busquets, Xavi (Cuenca 87),

Iniesta, Messi, Fabregas (Thiago 78), Sanchez

(Pedro 66).

2nd legs

Apr 24

Barcelona 2 (Busquets 35, Iniesta 43)

Chelsea 2 (Ramires 45+1, Fernando Torres 90+1)

HT: 2-1. Att: 95,845. Ref: Cakir (Tur)

Chelsea 3-2 on agg

Barcelona: Valdes - Mascherano, Pique (Daniel

Alves 26), Puyol, Busquets, Xavi, Iniesta, Cuenca

(Tello 68), Messi, Fabregas (Keita 74), Sanchez.

Chelsea: Cech - Ivanovic, Cahill (Bosingwa 12),

Terry, Cole, Mikel, Lampard, Raul Meireles, Mata

(Kaluou 58), Ramires, Drogba (Fernando Torres 80).

Sent off: Terry 37min.

Apr 25

Real Madrid 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 6, 14)

Bayern Munich 1 (Robben pen 27)

Aet. HT: 2-1. 90mins: 2-1. Att: 80,354.

Ref: Kassai (Hun)

Agg 3-3; Bayern 3-1 on pens

Real Madrid: Casillas - Arbeloa, Pepe, Sergio Ramos,

Marcelo, Khedira, Xabi Alonso, Di Maria (Kaka 75), Ozil

(Granero 111), Cristiano Ronaldo, Benzema (Higuain 106).

Bayern: Neuer - Lahm, Boateng, Badstuber, Alaba,

Schweinsteiger, Luiz Gustavo, Robben, Kroos,

Ribery (Muller 95), Gomez.

EUROPA LEAGUE

Quarter-finals

1st legs

Apr 29

Real Madrid (Spa) 2 (Falcão 9, Salviro 89)

Hanover (Ger) 1 (Diouf 38)

HT: 1-1. Att: 29,000. Ref: Lannoy (Fra)

AZ Alkmaar (Hol) 2 (Holman 45+1, Martens 79)

Valencia (Spa) 1 (Mehmet 51)

HT: 1-0. Att: 16,100. Ref: Atkinson (Eng)

Schalke (Ger) 2 (Raul 22, 59)

Athletic Bilbao (Spa) 4 (Llorente 21, 73,

De Marcos 81, Muniaín 90+3)

HT: 1-1. Att: 53,883. Ref: Proenca (Por)

Sporting Lisbon (Por) 2 (Izmailov 51, Insaia 64)

Metallist Kharkiv (Ukr) 1 (Cleiton Xavier pen 90+1)

HT: 0-0. Att: 40,512. Ref: Stark (Ger)

2nd legs

Apr 19

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Ibai Gomez 41, Susaeta 55)

Schalke 2 (Huntelaar 29, Raul 52)

HT: 1-1. Att: 39,000. Ref: Rizzoli (Ita)

Athletic 6-4 on agg

Hanover 1 (Diouf 81)

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Adrian 63, Falcão 87)

HT: 0-0. Att: 44,000. Ref: Clattenburg (Eng)

Athletic 4-2 on agg

Metallist Kharkiv 1 (Cristaldo 57)

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Van Wolfswinkel 44)

HT: 0-1. Att: 38,683. Ref: Collum (Sco)

Sporting 3-2 on agg

Valencia 4 (Rami 15, 17, Jordi Alba 56, Pablo 80)

AZ Alkmaar 0

HT: 2-0. Att: 34,500. Ref: Kravtsov (Cze)

Valencia 5-2 on agg

Semi-finals

1st legs

Apr 19

Athletic Bilbao 4 (Falcão 18, 78, Miranda 49,

Adrian 54)

Valencia 2 (Jonas 45+3, Ricardo Costa 90+4)

HT: 1-1. Att: 40,000. Ref: Thomson (Sco)

Apr 19

Sporting Lisbon 2 (Insaia 75, Diego Capel 80)

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Aurtenetxe 54)

HT: 0-0. Att: 37,268. Ref: Eriksson (Swe)

2nd legs

Apr 26

Athletic Bilbao 3 (Susaeta 17, Ibai Gomez 45+1,

Llorente 88)

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Van Wolfswinkel 44)

HT: 2-1. Att: 37,000. Ref: Atkinson (Eng)

Athletic Bilbao 4-3 on agg

Apr 26

Valencia 0

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Adrian 60)

HT: 0-0. Att: 45,000. Ref: Skomina (Sln)

Athletic Bilbao 5-2 on agg

Sent off: Tiago (Athletic) 79min

ANDORRA

Division split after 14-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

ANDORRA - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP - FINAL										
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts			
Lusitans (C)	20	11	7	2	48	18	40			
FC S'ta Coloma	20	11	5	4	56	17	38			
UE S'ta Coloma	20	10	7	3	61	20	37			
Sant Julia	20	10	6	4	57	22	36			

ANDORRA – RELEGATION GROUP – FINAL							
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Principat	20	8	3	9	32	32	27
Engordany	20	6	4	10	32	51	22
Inter*	20	5	3	12	34	65	18
Ranger's (R)	20	1	1	18	16	111	4

**Inter enter rel/room play-off*



BOSNIA

Cup clash abandoned

Borac Banjaluka's Bosnian Cup semi-final at home to Zeljeznicar was abandoned after home supporters hit a linesman with a missile midway through the second half. This was the second successive match between the two teams to be abandoned after their league fixture last

September was halted at the same venue.

Zeljeznicar, who were leading 1-0 through a Zajko Zeba free-kick when the trouble erupted, were awarded the game.



CROATIA

Dinamo wrap up title

A 3-0 win away to Sibenik gave Dinamo Zagreb a seventh successive league

title with five games to go.

"There was an expectation for us to be champions and that was effectively secured in our derby success against Hajduk," said Dinamo coach Ante Cacic.

Ex-Dinamo striker Davor Vugrinec broke the Croatian top-flight scoring record when the 37-year-old scored the 127th league goal of his career.



Champs...Dinamo Zagreb's Ivan Krstanovic (left) and Milan Badelj



CZECH REPUBLIC

Family tradition

Daniel Vesely became the fourth generation of his family to represent Slavia Prague when he appeared as a sub in the 2-0 victory over Viktoria Zizkov. The 19-year-old was following in the footsteps of his great grandfather, his grandfather and his father – who were all called Frantisek.

Apr 1: Anderlecht 1 Kortrijk 1.
Apr 6: Standard 0 Anderlecht 0.
Apr 7: Genk 2 Gent 0.
Apr 8: Kortrijk 3 Club Brugge 1.
Apr 11: Genk 2 Kortrijk 0; Gent 1 Anderlecht 4.
Apr 12: Standard 1 Club Brugge 1.
Apr 14: Anderlecht 1 Gent 3.
Apr 15: Club Brugge 1 Gent 0; Kortrijk 1 Standard 1.
Apr 21: Kortrijk 1 Gent 4.
Apr 22: Club Brugge 0 Anderlecht 1; Genk 3 Standard 2.

BELGIUM – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP*

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	5	2	2	1	7	5	42
Club Brugge	5	2	1	2	5	5	38
Genk	5	4	0	1	10	5	35
Gent	5	2	0	3	8	8	34
Standard	5	0	3	2	4	8	29
Kortrijk	5	1	2	2	6	9	28

10-round stage (5x2)

*Teams carried forward half the points (rounded up) gained during regular season

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	25	20	3	2	54	14	63
Ludogorets	25	17	4	4	60	14	55
Chernomorets	25	16	6	3	49	15	54
Levski	25	16	2	7	43	24	50
Lok Plovdiv	25	15	4	6	35	28	49
Lovchev	25	14	7	4	42	21	49
Cherno More	25	13	4	8	38	19	43
Slavia	25	13	4	8	37	32	43
Beroe	25	8	6	11	26	32	30
Minyor	25	7	8	10	28	35	29
Montana	25	7	5	13	22	40	26
Botev	25	5	6	14	19	36	21
Lok Sofia	25	4	7	14	21	43	19
V-Rakovski	25	3	4	18	14	47	13
Kaliakra	25	2	4	19	20	57	10
Svetkavitsa	25	1	4	20	6	57	7

Standings on Apr 24

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo (C)	27	21	5	1	66	10	68
Hajduk	27	15	6	6	47	22	51
Slaven	26	12	8	6	33	24	44
Split	27	12	7	8	40	32	43
Cibalia	27	12	6	9	33	30	42
Zagreb	27	12	6	9	34	37	42
Lokomotiva	27	11	6	10	29	30	39
Zadar	27	11	6	10	27	35	39
Istra	27	10	8	9	29	37	38
Osijek	26	9	8	9	35	36	35
Rijeka	27	8	10	9	26	25	34
Inter	27	9	5	13	29	32	32
Lucko	27	5	11	11	24	34	26
Sibenik	27	6	7	14	26	37	25
Karlovac* (R)	26	4	6	16	18	49	17
Varazdin** (R)	24	2	3	19	16	52	8

Standings on Apr 24

30-round season (15x2); bottom 5 will be relegated
*1pt deducted for failing to appear for game away to Rijeka

**1pt deducted for failing to play home game against Rijeka

*Varazdin expelled from league for failing to pay players; remaining matches cancelled

CYPRUS

Division split into championship, placement and relegation groups after 26-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

CYPRUS – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEL	29	19	7	3	36	9	64
Apollon	29	19	5	5	43	16	62
Anorthosis	29	17	8	4	35	15	59
Omonia	29	17	6	6	49	22	57

Standings on Apr 24

6-round stage (3x2)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Mar 30: Bohemians 1905 1 Zizkov 2.

Apr 1: Jablonec 1 Slovac 0; Mlada Boleslav 0 Teplice 1; Olomouc 1 Slavia 0; Ceske Budejovice 1 Hradec Kralove 0; Sparta 0 Pribram 2; Dukla 1 Liberec 2.

Apr 2: Ostrava 2 Pizen 3.
Apr 6: Dukla 2 Bohemians 1905 0; Teplice 0 Ceske Budejovice 1; Mlada Boleslav 2 Olomouc 3.

Apr 7: Pribram 4 Jablonec 3; Liberec 1 Sparta 3.

Apr 8: Pizen 1 Slovac 0; Hradec Kralove 0 Ostrava 1.

Apr 9: Slavia 2 Zizkov 0.

Apr 13: Ceske Budejovice 1 Slavia 0.

Apr 14: Sparta 2 Teplice 2; Slovac 0 Hradec Kralove 3.

Apr 15: Jablonec 0 Dukla 2; Bohemians 1905 0 Mlada Boleslav 3; Zizkov 0 Pizen 0; Olomouc 4 Pribram 4.

Apr 16: Ostrava 1 Liberec 3.

Apr 20: Dukla 4 Ostrava 1; Liberec 4 Zizkov 0.

Apr 21: Pribram 1 Ceske Budejovice 2.

Apr 22: Hradec Kralove 0 Pizen 1; Slavia 0 Slovac 1; Teplice 3 Jablonec 2; Mlada Boleslav 2 Sparta 0.

Apr 23: Olomouc 4 Bohemians 1905 0.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liberec	26	18	4	4	62	29	58
Sparta	26	17	3	6	45	24	54
Pizen	26	16	5	5	57	33	53
M Boleslav	26	13	5	8	44	31	44
Dukla	26	11	8	7	39	26	41
Teplice	26	11	7	8	31	29	40
Pribram	26	11	6	9	43	43	39
Jablonec	26	10	6	10	51	37	36
Slovacko	26	10	3	13	23	31	33
C Budejovice	26	8	8	10	29	42	32
H Kralove	26	8	6	12	20	28	30
Slavia	26	6	10	10	20	27	28
Olomouc*	26	9	9	8	37	34	27
Boh'ians 1905	26	5	5	16	17	50	20
Ostrava	26	4	6	16	22	45	18
Zizkov	26	4	3	19	18	49	15

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

*9pts deducted for match-fixing

DENMARK

Mar 31: Horsens 1 AaB 0.

Apr 1: Midtjylland 2 Silkeborg 2; Nordsjaelland 2 HB Koge 0; Lyngby 1 Copenhagen 3; Brondby 1 OB 0.

Apr 2: AGF 1 Sonderjyske 3.

Apr 4: AaB 1 Midtjylland 2.

Apr 5: Sonderjyske 1 Nordsjaelland 0; HB Koge 1 Lyngby 4; Silkeborg 2 AGF 1; Copenhagen 3 Brondby 1.

Apr 6: OB 0 Horsens 1.

Apr 8: AaB 3 Silkeborg 1; Midtjylland 1 Nordsjaelland 1.

Apr 9: OB 1 Sonderjyske 1; Brondby 1 HB Koge 1;

Horsens 0 Lyngby 0; AGF 0 Copenhagen 0.

Apr 14: Midtjylland 2 OB 0.

Apr 15: Nordsjaelland 2 Silkeborg 1; Lyngby 0 Sonderjyske 4; HB Koge 0 Copenhagen 5; Horsens 2 Brondby 0.

Apr 16: AGF 1 AaB 1.

Apr 21: AaB 0 Nordsjaelland 2.

Apr 22: Silkeborg 3 Lyngby 0; Copenhagen 2 Horsens 1; Sonderjyske 2 HB Koge 1; Brondby 0 Midtjylland 2.

Apr 23: OB 1 AGF 2.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Copenhagen	27	17	7	3	47	20	58
Nordsjaelland	27	16	4	7	37	19	52
Horsens	27	13	6	8	41	32	45
Midtjylland	27	13	6	8	41	35	45
AGF	27	9	12	6	33	27	39
Silkeborg	27	10	8	9	43	38	38
Sonderjyske	27	10	7	10	36	39	37
AaB	27	9	8	10	36	36	35
Brondby	27	8	8	11	28	33	32
OB	27	7	6	14	38	45	27
Lyngby	27	6	4	17	26	48	22
HB Koge	27	3	6	18	26	60	15

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ENGLAND

Saturday, March 31

Aston Villa 2 (Collins 77, Lichaj 80)

Chelsea 4 (Sturridge 9, Ivanovic 51, 83, Fernando Torres 90+2) Att: 34,740

Everton 2 (McAuley og 18, Anichebe 68)

West Bromwich 0 Att: 32,051

Fulham 2 (Dempsey 2, Duff 13)

Norwich 1 (Wilbraham 77) Att: 25,700

Manchester City 3 (Balotelli pen 43, 85, Kolarov 86)

Swansea 3 (Larsson 31, 55, Bendtner 45+4)

Att: 47,007

Queens Park Rangers 2 (Taarabt 22, Diakite 66)

Arsenal 1 (Walcott 37) Att: 18,033

Wigan 2 (Alcaraz 55, Moses 90+3)

Stoke 0 Att: 19,786

Wolverhampton 2 (Kightly 53, Jarvis 88)

Bolton 3 (Petrov pen 63, Marcos Alonso 80, K Davies 83) Att: 25,215

Sunday, April 1

Newcastle 2 (Cisse 19, 59)

Liverpool 0 Att: 52,363

Tottenham 3 (Van der Vaart 19, Adebayor 73, 86)

Swansea 1 (Sigurdsson 59) Att: 36,174

Monday, April 2

Blackburn 0

Manchester United 2 (Valencia 81, Young 86)

Att: 26,532

Friday, April 6

Swansea 0

Newcastle 2 (Cisse 5, 69) Att: 19,874

Saturday, April 7

Bolton 0

Fulham 3 (Dempsey 30, 45, Diarra 80) Att: 21,939

Chelsea 2 (Ivanovic 62, Mata 90+3)

Wigan 1 (Diam 82) Att: 40,651

Liverpool 1 (Suarez 82)

Aston Villa 1 (Herd 10) Att: 44,321

Norwich 2 (Howson 39, Holt 76)

Everton 2 (Jelavic 22, 61) Att: 26,554

Stoke 2 (Huth 37, Crouch 61)

Wolverhampton 1 (Kightly 26) Att: 27,005

Sunderland 0

Tottenham 0 Att: 39,335

West Bromwich 3 (Olsson og 7, Fortune 69, Ridgeway 85)

Blackburn 0 Att: 23,414

Sunday, April 8

Arsenal 1 (Arletta 87)

Manchester City 0 Att: 60,096

Manchester United 2 (Rooney pen 15, Scholes 68)

Queens Park Rangers 0 Att: 75,505

Monday, April 9

Aston Villa 1 (Weimann 32)

Stoke 1 (Huth 71) Att: 30,100

Everton 4 (Gueye 52, Pienaar 75, Osman 76, Anichebe 81)

Sunderland 0 Att: 32,249

Fulham 1 (Dempsey 82)

Chelsea 1 (Lampard pen 45) Att: 25,697

Newcastle 2 (Ben Arfa 73, Cisse 83)

Bolton 0 Att: 52,264

Tottenham 1 (Defoe 33)

Norwich 2 (Pilkington 13, Bennett 66) Att: 36,126

Tuesday, April 10

Blackburn 2 (Yakubu 36, pen 61)

Liverpool 3 (Rodriguez 13, 16, Carroll 90+1)

Att: 23,571

Wednesday, April 11

Manchester City 4 (Aguero 6, 54, Tevez 61, Silva 64)

West Bromwich 0 Att: 46,746

Queens Park Rangers



FINLAND

Teen sets new record

Seventeen-year-old Joel Pohjanpalo scored the Veikkausliiga's fastest-ever hat-trick on the opening day of the Finnish season as defending champions HJK Helsinki came from a goal down to beat Mariehamm 3-1.

Pohjanpalo, who spent a week on trial with

Liverpool in March, took just two minutes and 42 seconds to record his treble in what was only his second top-flight appearance for the club.

Pohjanpalo was also on target for HJK 11 days earlier when he scored in the League Cup Final against TPS Turku. However, TPS went on to beat HJK on penalties to win the trophy for the first time.



Winners...Marseille celebrate



FRANCE

OM end losing run

An extra-time goal by substitute Brandao gave Marseille a 1-0 win over Lyon in the League Cup Final to end a desperate run of form that had seen Didier Deschamps' side go 12 games without a win in all competitions.

"It's our sixth title in three years," said coach

Deschamps, whose side became the first to win the tournament for three successive seasons.

"That's an average of two per year, for a club that hadn't won anything in 17 years."

Lyon, who had Dejan Lovren sent off against Marseille, will hope to end their four-year trophy drought in the French Cup Final against Quevilly.

Sunday, April 15

Manchester United 4 (Rooney pen 7, 73, Welbeck 43, Nani 90+3)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 75,138

Monday, April 16

Arsenal 1 (Vermaelen 21)
Wigan 2 (Di Santo 7, Jordi Gomez 8) Att: 60,060

Saturday, April 21

Arsenal 0
Chelsea 0 Att: 60,111

Aston Villa 0
Sunderland 0 Att: 32,557

Blackburn 2 (Formica 41, Hoilett 49)
Norwich 0 Att: 23,218

Bolton 1 (Eagles 14)
Swansea 1 (Sinclair 6) Att: 25,401

Fulham 2 (Pogrebnyak 58, Senderos 89)
Wigan 1 (Boyce 57) Att: 25,689

Newcastle 3 (Cabaye 14, 57, Cisse 18)
Stoke 0 Att: 52,162

Queens Park Rangers 1 (Taarabt 24)
Tottenham 0 Att: 18,021

Sunday, April 22

Liverpool 0
West Bromwich 1 (Odemwinkle 75) Att: 43,660

Manchester United 4 (Rooney 41, 69, Welbeck 57, Nani 60)
Everton 4 (Jelavic 33, 83, Fellaini 67, Pienaar 85) Att: 75,522

Wolverhampton 0
Manchester City 2 (Aguero 27, Nasri 74) Att: 24,576

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man United	35	26	5	4	86	32	83
Man City	35	25	5	5	87	27	80
Arsenal	35	20	5	10	67	43	65
Newcastle	34	18	8	8	53	42	62
Tottenham	34	17	8	9	57	39	59
Chelsea	34	16	10	8	56	38	58
Everton	34	13	9	12	42	38	48
Liverpool	34	12	10	12	40	37	46
Fulham	34	12	10	12	45	44	46
West Brom	35	13	6	16	41	47	45
Sunderland	35	11	11	13	42	41	44
Swansea	35	11	10	14	39	45	43
Norwich	35	11	10	14	47	60	43
Stoke	34	11	9	14	32	48	42
Aston Villa	34	7	15	12	35	48	36
QPR	35	9	7	19	39	57	34
Wigan	35	8	10	17	34	60	34
Blackburn	35	8	7	20	47	73	31
Bolton	33	9	3	21	37	66	30
Wolves (R)	35	5	8	22	34	75	23

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

27 Robin Van Persie (Arsenal)
26 Wayne Rooney (Manchester United)
22 Sergio Aguero (Manchester City)
16 Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Blackburn)
16 Demba Ba (Newcastle)
16 Clint Dempsey (Fulham)

FA CUP

Quarter-finals

Mar 27: Tottenham 3 Bolton 1.

Replay

Mar 27: Sunderland 0 Everton 2.

Semi-finals

Apr 14: Liverpool 2 Everton 1.

Apr 15: Tottenham 1 Chelsea 5.

FRANCE

Saturday, March 31

Auxerre 2 (Chafni 24, Oliech 66)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 14,183

Bordeaux 1 (Tremoulinas pen 72)
Dijon 1 (Guerbert 90+1) Att: 20,295

Lorient 0
Evian 1 (Dja Djedje 19) Att: 14,371

Nancy 2 (Traore 18, Mollo 89)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Sissoko 50) Att: 18,802

Saint-Etienne 2 (Gradel 22, Marchal 42)
Nice 3 (Mounier 35, 57, Clerc 89) Att: 22,035

Sochaux 2 (Maiga 77, Privat 82)
Brest 1 (Grougi 3) Att: 17,299

Sunday, April 1

Caen 0
Ajaccio 0 Att: 13,480

Lille 2 (Hazard pen 12, Payet 31)
Toulouse 1 (Aurier 60) Att: 17,057

Rennes 1 (Erdinc 5)
Lyon 1 (Lopez 76) Att: 21,346

Saturday, April 7

Ajaccio 1 (Medjani 78)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Sinama-Pongolle 72) Att: 6,352

Brest 3 (Daf 5, Grougi pen 10, Alphonse 52)
Lille 1 (Payet 26) Att: 13,017

Dijon 0
Nancy 2 (Traore 5, 84) Att: 14,526

Evian 1 (Leroy 34)
Rennes 3 (Hadji 47, Angoula og 88, Erdinc 90+2) Att: 9,672

Lyon 2 (Lopez pen 29, pen 72)
Auxerre 1 (Traore 42) Att: 31,492

Montpellier 2 (Belhanda 4, Camara 55)
Sochaux 1 (Maiga 28) Att: 18,429

Valenciennes 2 (Danic 62, Samassa pen 89)
Toulouse 0 Att: 13,015

Sunday, April 8

Caen 1 (Seube 2)
Bordeaux 0 Att: 14,936

Nice 2 (Mounier 49, Civelli 58)
Lorient 0 Att: 10,001

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Menez 6, Alex Costa 61)
Marseille 1 (A Ayew 59) Att: 46,252

Wednesday, April 11

Marseille 1 (Mbila 33)
Montpellier 3 (Belhanda pen 7, 70, Giroud 49) Att: 41,519

Sunday, April 15

Auxerre 1 (Le Tallec 86)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Nene 23) Att: 12,010

Lille 4 (Poulard og 16, Cole 37, Bruno 81, Hazard pen 87)
Ajaccio 1 (Sammaritano 90+3) Att: 16,887

Lorient 2 (Bedimo og 69, Campbell 77)
Montpellier 1 (Giroud 78) Att: 15,952

Nancy 2 (Traore 47, Pygremier 74)
Bordeaux 2 (Gouffran 17, Tremoulinas pen 90) Att: 18,100

Saint-Etienne 2 (Gradel pen 48, Sako 72)
Brest 1 (Jemaa 63) Att: 21,068

Sochaux 1 (Maiga 71)
Dijon 0 Att: 19,599

Valenciennes 0
Evian 3 (Khelifa 29, Berigaud 35, Sagbo pen 44) Att: 13,794

Monday, April 16

Rennes 3 (Feret 23, Doumbia 44, Pitroipa 82)
Nice 1 (Clerc 59) Att: 16,722

Wednesday, April 18

Marseille 1 (Remy pen 26)
Caen 1 (Bulot 11) Att: 39,261

Toulouse 3 (Sirieux 9, Riviere 22, Umut 90+1)
Lyon 0 Att: 21,352

Saturday, April 21

Bordeaux 2 (Jussie 1, 29)
Marseille 1 (J Ayew 56) Att: 31,440

Brest 0
Rennes 1 (Feret pen 45+3) Att: 14,391

Caen 1 (Nabab 71)
Saint-Etienne 4 (Montaroup og 39, Aubameyang 60, 83, Grubel 70) Att: 17,256

Dijon 0
Lille 2 (Mavuba 39, Hazard 45+1) Att: 14,005

Evian 2 (Angoula 10, Abdenmour og 75)
Toulouse 1 (Ben Yedder 72) Att: 10,272

Montpellier 1 (Camara 5)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 18,731

Nice 1 (Monzon pen 36)
Auxerre 0 Att: 9,480

Sunday, April 22

Ajaccio 0
Nancy 0 Att: 6,140

Lyon 3 (Cris 38, Lopez 77, Gomis 84)
Lorient 2 (Monnet-Paquet 22, Autret 26) Att: 29,000

Paris Saint-Germain 6 (Pastore 6, Thiago Motta 25, Menez 44, Nene 55, 60, Armand 90+2)
Sochaux 1 (Maiga 12) Att: 44,366

FRANCE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Montpellier	33	21	6	6	60	31	69
PSG	33	19	10	4	63	35	67
Lille	33	17	11	5	62	36	62
Lyon	33	17	5	11	52	43	56
Rennes	33	15	9	9	45	36	54
Saint-Etienne	33	15	8	10	44	37	53
Toulouse	33	15	8	10	36	30	53
Bordeaux	33	11	13	9	40	37	46
Evian	33	12	9	12	48	47	45
Marseille	33	10	11	12	40	38	41
Nancy	33	10	11	12	33	39	41
Nice	33	9	10	14	34	39	37
Valenciennes	33	10	7	16	31	40	37
Lorient	33	8	11	14	32	44	35
Caen	33	8	10	15	35	49	34
Dijon	33	9	7	17	37	54	34
Ajaccio	33	7	13	13	33	54	34
Brest	33	6	15	12	28	33	33
Sochaux	33	8	9	16	34	54	33
Auxerre	33	5	13	15	37	48	28

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

20 Olivier Giroud (Montpellier)
16 Eden Hazard (Lille)
16 Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)

FRENCH CUP

Semi-finals

Apr 10: GFCO Ajaccio 0 Lyon 4.

Apr 11: Quevilly 2 Rennes 1.

GERMANY

Friday, March 30

Borussia Dortmund 4 (Kagawa 33, Blaszczykowski 49, Hummels 82, Perisic 87)
Stuttgart 4 (Ibisevic 71, Schieber 77, 79, Gentner 90+2) Att: 80,720

Saturday, March 31

Augsburg 2 (Koo 19, Rafael pen 45)
Cologne 1 (Podolski pen 42) Att: 30,660

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Freiburg 2 (Schuster 8, Calliguri 60) Att: 28,342

Hertha 1 (Kobiashvili 13)
Wolfsburg 4 (Janker og 29, Helmes 34, 81, Mandzukic 77) Att: 46,388

Kaiserslautern 0
Hamburg 1 (Jansen 28) Att: 44,745

Nuremberg 0
Bayern Munich 1 (Robben 69) Att: 48,548

Werder Bremen 0
Mainz 3 (Szalai 19, Choupo-Moting 48, 74) Att: 40,132

Sunday, April 1

Hanover 2 (Ya Konan 57, Diouf 76)
Monchengladbach 1 (Nordtveit 78) Att: 49,000

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Sallihovic pen 30)
Schalke 1 (Huntelaar pen 80) Att: 30,150

Saturday, April 7

Bayern Munich 2 (Gomez 1, 60)
Augsburg 1 (Koo 23) Att: 69,000

Cologne 1 (Jemal 39)
Werder Bremen 1 (Rosenberg 24) Att: 50,000

Freiburg 2 (Calliguri pen 53, Makiadi 79)
Nuremberg 2 (Didavi 8, Pekhart 45+2) Att: 24,000



Successful defence...Dortmund



GERMANY

Dortmund do it again

Borussia Dortmund retained the Bundesliga title with a 2-0 win at home to Borussia Mönchengladbach. Victory earned Jürgen Klopp's side their eighth championship and stretched their unbeaten league run to 26 games – a record for a single German season.

Dortmund's run-in

included a fourth straight victory over their nearest Bundesliga challengers Bayern Munich, who they meet again in the German Cup Final on May 12.

Kaiserslautern's 2-1 win against Hertha Berlin was their first in 21 games, but it was not enough to save them from relegation.

Eintracht Frankfurt and Greuther Fürth won promotion to the top flight.



HOLLAND

Cocu adds Cup to CV

Interim coach Phillip Cocu did his chances of landing the PSV Eindhoven job full-time no harm as he led the club to a 3-0 victory over Heracles in the Dutch Cup Final. Ola Toivonen opened the scoring in the 31st minute, with Dries Mertens and Jermain Lens adding further goals.



Temporary coach...Cocu

Kaiserslautern 1 (Bugera 86)
1899 Hoffenheim 2 (Sallihovic pen 26, Vukcevic 71) Att: 40,296

Mönchengladbach 0
Hertha 0 Att: 52,691

Stuttgart 4 (Hajnal 8, Ibisevic 49, 85, Kuzmanovic pen 65)
Mainz 1 (Ivanschitz pen 3) Att: 55,100

Wolfsburg 1 (Mandzukic 61)
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Lewandowski 22, 90, Gundogan 49) Att: 30,000

Sunday, April 8
Augsburg 1 (Petric pen 40)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Schurrle 55) Att: 54,141

Schalke 3 (Raul 6, 47, Huntelaar 63)
Hanover 0 Att: 61,673

Tuesday, April 10
Augsburg 1 (Rafael pen 5)
Stuttgart 3 (Tasci 24, Harnik 34, Ibisevic 84) Att: 30,660

Hertha 1 (Hubnik 81)
Freiburg 2 (Hubnik og 7, Freis 67) Att: 45,778

Mainz 4 (Polanski pen 19, Zidan 31, N Müller 37, Szalai 54)
Cologne 0 Att: 34,000

Werder Bremen 2 (Rosenberg 18, Naldo 74)
Mönchengladbach 2 (Hanke 52, 66) Att: 42,100

Wednesday, April 11
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Kießling 1, Rolfes 57, Reinartz 69)
Kaiserslautern 1 (Derstroff 42) Att: 25,627

Borussia Dortmund 1 (Lewandowski 77)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 80,720

Hanover 2 (Diouf 44, Ya Konan 77)
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 43,800

1899 Hoffenheim 4 (Vestergaard 17, Sallihovic pen 25, Johnson 51, Schipplock 59)
Hanover 0 Att: 27,000

Nuremberg 4 (Balitsch 25, Simons pen 37, Didavi 45, 87)
Schalke 1 (Holby 85) Att: 44,031

Friday, April 13
Stuttgart 4 (Gentner 37, Harnik 45+1, 53, Cacau 89)
Werder Bremen 1 (Rosenberg 25) Att: 59,000

Saturday, April 14
Bayer Leverkusen 3 (Schurrle 44, Kießling 51, 84)
Hertha 3 (Lasogga 63, Torun 71, 77) Att: 29,704

Bayern Munich 0
Mainz 0 Att: 69,000

Hamburg 1 (Son 12)
Hanover 0 Att: 57,000

Kaiserslautern 0
Nuremberg 2 (Didavi 43, Pekhart 73) Att: 42,552

Schalke 1 (Farfan 9)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Piszczek 17, Kehl 63)
Att: 61,673

Wolfsburg 1 (Helmes 27)
Augsburg 2 (Oehrl 13, Langkamp 88) Att: 25,143

Sunday, April 15
Freiburg 0
1899 Hoffenheim 0 Att: 23,500

Mönchengladbach 3 (Arango 19, Jantschke 53, Reus 55)
Cologne 0 Att: 52,990

Friday, April 20
Mainz 0
Wolfsburg 0 Att: 31,069

Saturday, April 21
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Perisic 23, Kagawa 59)
Mönchengladbach 0 Att: 80,720

Cologne 1 (Peszko 50)
Stuttgart 1 (Cacau 71) Att: 50,000

Hertha 1 (Niemeyer 60)
Kaiserslautern 2 (Kirch 27, Wooten 38) Att: 51,461

1899 Hoffenheim 0
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Schurrle 79) Att: 28,150

Nuremberg 1 (Didavi 64)
Hamburg 1 (Son 59) Att: 45,873

Werder Bremen 1 (Naldo 51)
Bayern Munich 2 (Naldo og 75, Ribery 90) Att: 42,100

Sunday, April 22
Augsburg 1 (Langkamp 6)
Schalke 1 (Huntelaar 38) Att: 30,660

Hanover 0
Freiburg 0 Att: 48,000

GERMANY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dortmund (C)	32	23	6	3	71	23	75
Bayern	32	21	4	7	71	21	67
Schalke	32	18	4	10	67	42	58
M'gladbach	32	16	8	8	46	24	56
Stuttgart	32	14	8	10	60	42	50
Leverkusen	32	13	9	10	47	43	48
Hanover	32	11	12	9	39	43	45
Werder	32	11	9	12	46	52	42
Hoffenheim	32	10	11	11	38	41	41
Wolfsburg	32	12	5	15	42	56	41
Nuremberg	32	11	6	15	34	43	39
Mainz	32	9	11	12	47	48	38
Freiburg	32	9	10	13	41	56	37
Hamburg	32	8	11	13	35	56	35
Augsburg	32	7	13	12	35	49	34
Cologne	32	8	6	18	37	67	30
Hertha	32	6	10	16	35	59	28
Kaisers'tern (R)	32	4	11	17	21	47	23

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

Leading scorers

25 Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich)
25 Klaas-Jan Huntelaar (Schalke)
20 Robert Lewandowski (Borussia Dortmund)

GREECE

Apr 1: Panetolikos 0 Olympiakos 1; Ergotelis 2 Atromitos 2; Panathinaikos 1 Aris 0; Asteras 0 OFI 2; PAOK 1 Giannina 2; Panionios 2 Levadiakos 0; Xanthi 1 Doxa 0; Kerkyra 2 AEK 2.

Apr 8: Atromitos 0 PAOK 0; Aris 0 Asteras 3 (awarded);

Doxa 1 Ergotelis 0; OFI 1 Panetolikos 0; Olympiakos 0 Kerkyra 1; Panathinaikos 3 Panionios 0; Giannina 2 AEK 1.
Apr 9: Levadiakos 2 Xanthi 0.
Apr 18: AEK 0 Atromitos 0; Asteras 0 Panathinaikos 2; Ergotelis 0 Levadiakos 1; Kerkyra 4 OFI 1; PAOK 2 Doxa 0; Panetolikos 5 Aris 1; Panionios 1 Xanthi 1; Giannina 0 Olympiakos 4.
Apr 22: Xanthi 4 Ergotelis 2; Aris 1 Kerkyra 1; Asteras 2 Panionios 0; Atromitos 0 Olympiakos 2; Doxa 1 AEK 1; Levadiakos 4 PAOK 3; OFI 0 Giannina 2; Panathinaikos 4 Panetolikos 0.

GREECE - FINAL*	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos (C)	30	23	4	3	70	17	73
Panathinaikos**	30	22	3	5	54	23	66
PAOK	30	14	8	8	45	27	50
Atromitos	30	13	11	6	32	26	50
AEK	30	13	9	8	36	30	48
Asteras	30	13	6	11	30	34	45
Levadiakos	30	11	6	13	33	42	39
Giannina	30	10	8	12	30	35	38
Aris**	30	10	10	10	29	33	37
OFI	30	10	7	13	27	32	37
Xanthi	30	10	6	14	31	35	36
Panionios	30	9	6	15	26	34	33
Kerkyra	30	8	8	14	31	44	32
Ergotelis (R)	30	7	8	15	27	44	29
Panetolikos (R)	30	7	7	16	23	37	28
Doxa (R)	30	4	5	21	11	42	17

*Teams placed 2nd to 5th enter play-offs to determine 2nd Champions League representatives
**3pts deducted for fan violence

HOLLAND

Mar 30: Utrecht 3 Excelsior 2.
Mar 31: Groningen 1 Heerenveen 3; Twente 2 Roda JC 0; PSV 2 VVV 0; Feyenoord 3 NAC 1.
Apr 1: NEC 2 De Graafschap 0; Ajax 6 Heracles 0; RKC 1 Den Haag 0; Vitesse 2 AZ 2.

Apr 10: Excelsior 0 NEC 2.
Apr 11: AZ 2 Twente 2; NAC 1 Heracles 2; Roda JC 0 Feyenoord 0; RKC 2 PSV 1; Heerenveen 0 Ajax 5.
Apr 12: De Graafschap 3 Utrecht 0; VVV 1 Vitesse 3; Den Haag 3 Groningen 0.
Apr 14: PSV 3 AZ 2; NEC 2 Heerenveen 4; Feyenoord 3 Excelsior 0; Twente 2 NAC 2.
Apr 15: Groningen 0 Roda JC 1; Vitesse 1 Den Haag 0; Ajax 3 De Graafschap 1; Utrecht 4 VVV 2; Heracles 1 RKC 1.
Apr 20: NAC 0 Roda JC 3.
Apr 21: Heerenveen 1 Vitesse 1; De Graafschap 2 Heracles 3; RKC 0 Utrecht 2; Excelsior 0 Twente 1.
Apr 22: Den Haag 1 Feyenoord 2; AZ 2 VVV 1; PSV 2 NEC 1; Ajax 2 Groningen 0.

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	31	20	7	4	66	34	67
AZ	31	18	7	6	62	33	61
Feyenoord	31	18	7	6	62	34	61
Twente	31	17	9	5	76	36	60
PSV	31	18	6	7	76	45	60
Heerenveen	31	16	10	5	69	51	58
Vitesse	31	14	7	10	42	36	49
Roda JC	31	14	2	15	51	59	44
RKC	31	12	5	14	32	43	41
Heracles	31	11	7	13	48	52	40
NEC	31	12	4	15	38	42	40
Utrecht	31	10	9	12	49	52	39
Groningen	31	10	5	16	39	58	35
Den Haag	31	8	8	15	34	55	32
NAC	31	8	7	16	38	50	31
VVV	31	7	4	20	36	73	25
De Graafschap	31	5	4	22	28	68	19
Excelsior	31	4	6	21	23	68	18

34-round season (17x2); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs



STANDINGS ON APRIL 23

PBS	TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Cristiano Ronaldo Real Madrid (Spa)	42	2	84
2	Lionel Messi Barcelona (Spa)	41	2	82
3	Robin Van Persie Arsenal (Eng)	27	2	54
4	Wayne Rooney Manchester United (Eng)	26	2	52
5	Mario Gomez Bayern Munich (Ger)	25	2	50
	Klaas-Jan Huntelaar Schalke (Ger)	25	2	50
7	Burak Yilmaz Trabzonspor (Tur)	32	1.5	48
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic Milan (Ita)	24	2	48
9	Aleksandrs Cekulajevs Trans Narva (Est)	46	1	46
10	Sergio Aguero Manchester City (Eng)	22	2	44
	Radamel Falcao Atletico Madrid (Spa)	22	2	44
12	Bas Dost Heerenveen (Hol)	28	1.5	42
	Gonzalo Higuain Real Madrid (Spa)	21	2	42



HUNGARY

Third in three years

Videoton won the League Cup for a third time, beating Kecskemeti 3-0 in the Final.



ISRAEL

Breaking through

Just 12 years after the club's foundation following the merger of Hapoel Kiryat Shmona and Maccabi Kiryat

Shmona, Hapoel Ironi Kiryat Shmona are Israeli Premier League champions.

They are only the second team to break the stranglehold of Israel's "big four" – Maccabi Tel Aviv, Maccabi Haifa, Hapoel Tel-Aviv and Beitar Jerusalem – who have won 26 of the last 28 league titles.

The last club to break that monopoly was Hapoel Haifa in 1999 when they

were captained by Ray Ben Shimon – the current Kiryat Shmona coach.



ITALY

Player dies on pitch

Udinese's former Italy under-21 midfielder Piermarco Morosini died following a suspected heart attack while playing on loan for Livorno in a Serie B game at Pescara.



Tragedy...Morosini



PORTUGAL

Saviola's winner

Javier Saviola came off the bench to secure a fourth successive Portuguese League Cup for Benfica as they beat Gil Vicente 2-1 in the Final.

The Argentinian struck with seven minutes left after Ze Luis had cancelled out Rodrigo's opening goal for Benfica.

ISRAEL

Division split into championship and relegation groups after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

Championship group

Mar 31: Bnei Yehuda 1 Netanya 0; Maccabi Tel Aviv 5 Bnei Sakhnin 2.

Apr 2: Maccabi Haifa 3 Ashdod 0; Kiryat Shmona 0 Maccabi Tel Aviv 0.

Apr 14: Ashdod 1 Maccabi Tel Aviv 1; Bnei Sakhnin 5 Kiryat Shmona 0; Maccabi Tel Aviv 3 Bnei Yehuda 3; Netanya 1 Maccabi Haifa 0.

ISRAEL - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiryat Sh'a (C)	33	19	10	4	42	21	67
Netanya	33	15	8	10	47	41	53
H Tel Aviv*	33	14	13	6	56	30	52
M Haifa	33	14	9	10	51	40	51
Bnei Sakhnin**	33	15	7	11	56	42	50
Bnei Yehuda	33	13	11	9	43	30	50
M Tel Aviv	33	14	7	12	47	35	49
Ashdod	33	12	12	9	40	39	48

7-round stage (7x1)

*3pts deducted because of fan violence during home match against Maccabi Tel Aviv

**2pts deducted for contract irregularities

ITALY

Saturday, March 31

Catania 1 (Spolli 57)

Milan 1 (Robinho 34) Att: 20,253

Parma 3 (Mariga 6, Floccari 12, 72)

Lazio 1 (Scaloni 36) Att: 13,115

Sunday, April 1

Bologna 1 (Sorensen 50)

Palermo 3 (Donati 68, Hernandez 76, Morleo og 86) Att: 19,440

Cagliari 2 (Conti 11, Pinilla 55)

Atalanta 0 Att: 5,000

Florentina 1 (Ljajic 71)

Chievo 2 (Pelissier 24, Rigoni 88) Att: 19,791

Internazionale 5 (Milito 13, 27, pen 85, Samuel 38, Zarate 74)

Genoa 4 (Moretti 45+2, Palacio pen 59, Gilardino pen 80, pen 90) Att: 42,322

Juventus 3 (Bonucci 53, Vidal 75, Quagliarella 83)

Napoli 0 Att: 38,644

Lecco 0

Cesena 0 Att: 6,950

Roma 5 (Marquino 25, Osvaldo 34, Simplicio 55, Bojan 62, Lamela 90+2)

Novara 2 (Caracciolo 17, Morimoto 78) Att: 38,237

Siena 1 (Destro 70)

Udinese 0 Att: 9,094

Saturday, April 7

Atalanta 1 (Schelotto 9)

Siena 2 (Larrendo pen 13, Destro 90+1) Att: 15,508

Cagliari 2 (Astori 5, Pinilla 61)

Internazionale 2 (Milito 6, Cambiaso 64)

Att: 15,000

Cesena 0

Bologna 0 Att: 16,497

Chievo 3 (Bradley 6, Pellissier pen 20, Paloschi 50)

Catania 2 (Andreoli og 32, Almiron 85) Att: 8,000

Lazio 3 (Candrea 9, Mauri 68, Ledesma pen 81)

Napoli 1 (Pandev 34) Att: 38,410

Lecco 4 (Muriel 22, 49, Di Michele 44, pen 56)

Roma 2 (Bojan 87, Lamela 90) Att: 12,592

Milan 1 (Ibrahimovic pen 31)

Florentina 2 (Jovetic 47, Amauri 89) Att: 58,646

Novara 1 (Mascara 68)

Genoa 1 (Palacio 7) Att: 10,066

Palermo 0

Juventus 2 (Bonucci 56, Quagliarella 69)

Att: 28,941

Udinese 3 (Asamoah 45, 90+2, Di Natale 56)

Parma 1 (Lucarelli 84) Att: 17,831

Tuesday, April 10

Chievo 0

Milan 1 (Muntari 8) Att: 20,000

Wednesday, April 11

Catania 1 (Bergessio 52)

Lecco 2 (Corvia 89, Di Michele 90+1) Att: 16,570

Florentina 0

Palermo 0 Att: 20,037

Genoa 1 (Rossi 41)

Cesena 1 (Mutu 76) Att: 19,822

Internazionale 2 (Milito 42, pen 81)

Siena 1 (D'Agostino 6) Att: 46,327

Juventus 2 (Pepe 30, Del Piero 82)

Lazio 1 (Mauri 45) Att: 38,346

Napoli 1 (Lavezzi 33)

Atalanta 3 (Bonaventura 10, Bellini 58, Carmona 68) Att: 35,519

Parma 2 (Giovino 27, Jonathan 40)

Novara 0 Att: 11,682

Roma 3 (Osvaldo 8, Totti 86, Marquino 90+2)

Udinese 1 (Fernandes 43) Att: 29,672

Thursday, April 12

Bologna 1 (Diamanti 54)

Cagliari 0 Att: 15,124

Saturday, April 21

Catania 2 (Gomez 31, Seymour 85)

Atalanta 0 Att: 14,446

Chievo 0

Udinese 0 Att: 8,000

Napoli 2 (Cavani 21, Cannavaro 37)

Novara 0 Att: 31,675

Parma 3 (Giovino 24, Floccari pen 73, Okaka pen 90)

Cagliari 0 Att: 14,271

Sunday, April 22

Cesena 2 (Santana 26, Rennella 28)

Palermo 2 (Bertolo 20, Silvestre 45) Att: 13,932

Florentina 0

Internazionale 0 Att: 23,567

Genoa 1 (Del Grosso og 80)

Siena 4 (Brienza 17, 37, Destro 19, Giorgi 49)

Att: 20,078

Juventus 4 (Vidal 4, 8, Pirlo 29, Marchisio 53)

Roma 0 Att: 38,686

Lazio 1 (Matuzalem 82)

Lecco 1 (Bozhinov 90+1) Att: 30,503

Milan 1 (Ibrahimovic 90)

Bologna 1 (Ramirez 26) Att: 51,725

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	33	19	14	0	57	18	71
Milan	33	20	8	5	63	27	68
Lazio	33	16	7	10	49	41	55
Udinese	33	14	10	9	44	32	52
Napoli	33	13	12	8	58	41	51
Roma	33	15	5	13	52	46	50
Inter	33	14	7	12	47	45	49
Catania	33	11	13	9	44	43	46
Chievo	33	11	10	12	30	40	43
Siena	33	11	9	13	41	35	42
Palermo	33	11	8	14	46	51	41
Bologna	33	10	11	12	34	39	41
Parma	33	10	11	12	44	50	41
Atalanta*	33	11	13	9	37	36	40
Florentina	33	9	11	13	32	38	38
Cagliari	33	9	11	13	33	42	38
Genoa	33	9	9	15	44	62	36
Lecco	33	8	11	14	38	49	35
Novara	33	5	10	18	27	56	25
Cesena	33	4	10	19	21	50	22

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

*6pts deducted because of involvement in match-fixing scandal

Leading scorers

24 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Milan)

20 Edinson Cavani (Napoli)

20 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)

20 Diego Milito (Internazionale)

NORWAY

Mar 30: Brann 3 Sandnes Ulf 1.

Mar 31: Stromsgodset 3 Valerenga 2.

Apr 1: Sogndal 0 Honefoss 0; Viking 1 Odd

Grenland 0; Haugesund 2 Molde 0; Fredrikstad 5

Stabaek 1; Lillestrom 2 Rosenborg 2.

Apr 2: Aalesund 0 Tromso 0.

Apr 9: Odd Grenland 2 Lillestrom 0; Stromsgodset

3 Haugesund 3; Tromso 3 Stabaek 0; Sandnes Ulf 1

Aalesund 1; Rosenborg 0 Sogndal 0; Honefoss 1

Fredrikstad 1; Molde 2 Brann 1.

Apr 10: Valerenga 1 Viking 0.

Apr 13: Fredrikstad 1 Rosenborg 2.

Apr 15: Tromso 3 Sandnes Ulf 1; Brann 1

Stromsgodset 2; Aalesund 2 Odd Grenland 1;

Sogndal 1 Haugesund 1; Lillestrom 1 Valerenga 1.

Apr 16: Viking 1 Molde 0; Stabaek 0 Honefoss 2.

Apr 20: Valerenga 0 Sogndal 2.

Apr 21: Haugesund 2 Brann 1.

Apr 22: Stromsgodset 1 Viking 0; Sandnes Ulf 2

Stabaek 1; Honefoss 3 Aalesund 1; Odd Grenland 1

Fredrikstad 1; Rosenborg 3 Tromso 0.

Apr 23: Molde 3 Lillestrom 2.

NORWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosenborg	5	3	2	0	10	4	11
Tromso	5	3	1	1	7	4	10
Stromsgodset	5	3	1	1	10	8	10
Sogndal	5	2	3	0	7	1	9
Honefoss	5	2	3	0	6	2	9
Molde	5	3	0	2	7	7	9
Haugesund	5	2	2	1	9	7	8
Viking	5	2	1	2	4	4	7
Valerenga	5	2	1	2	6	7	7
Aalesund	5	1	3	1	4	5	6
Fredrikstad	5	1	2	2	8	6	5
Sandnes Ulf	5	1	2	2	7	10	5
Odd Grenland	5	1	1	3	4	8	4
Brann	5	1	0	4	7	10	3
Lillestrom	5	0	3	2	5	8	3
Stabaek	5	0	1	4	2	12	1

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

POLAND

Mar 28: Lech 1 Gornik 0.

Mar 30: GKS 1 Lechia 3; Wisla 0 Legia 0.

Mar 31: Widzew 1 Ruch 2; Podbeskidzie 0 LKS 1;

Lech 3 Cracovia 1.

Apr 1: Gornik 2 Korona 0; Polonia 3 Slask 0.

Apr 2: Zagłębie 2 Jagiellonia 1.

Apr 4: Cracovia 3 Podbeskidzie 1.

Apr 5: Gornik 1 Polonia 0.

Apr 7: Legia 2 Ruch 0; Slask 1 GKS 0; Jagiellonia 1

Wisla 0.

Apr 9: LKS 1 Widzew 1; Lechia 0 Zagłębie 1;

Korona 2 Lech 2.

Apr 13: GKS 2 Jagiellonia 0; Korona 0 Zagłębie 2.

Apr 14: Podbeskidzie 1 Slask 1; Wisla 3 LKS 2;

Widzew 1 Legia 1.

Apr 15: Lech 2 Lechia 1; Ruch 0 Gornik 0.

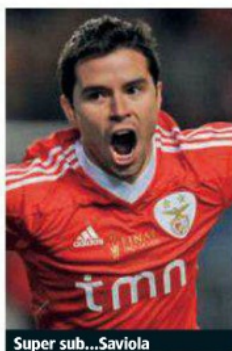
Apr 16: Polonia 2 Cracovia 1.

Apr 20: Cracovia 0 Widzew 0; Polonia 0 Ruch 1.

Apr 21: Legia 0 Lech 1; Jagiellonia 2 Gornik 1;

Podbeskidzie 1 Wisla 3.

Apr 2



Super sub...Saviola



SCOTLAND

Celtic take advantage

Celtic clinched their 43rd league championship with a 6-0 victory at Kilmarnock.

Their success was aided by a 10-point deduction for Rangers, who went into administration and were handed a 12-month transfer embargo by the Scottish Football Association.

Celtic manager Neil

Lennon, who won the league five times with the club as a player, called this season's triumph "the greatest moment in my professional life".

Hibernian, who last won the Scottish Cup 110 years ago, reached this year's Final with a 2-1 victory over Aberdeen at Hampden Park. They face Hearts on May 19 in the first all-Edinburgh Final since 1896.



Great moment...Lennon



SLOVENIA

Eight-goal triumph

Maribor wrapped up their 10th championship with an emphatic 8-0 thrashing of bottom side Triglav.

Etien Velikonja scored a hat-trick and Agim Ibrahim struck twice, with Aleksandr Rajcevic, Martin Sustersic (own goal) and Dalibor Volas also getting on the scoresheet.

Apr 20: Pacos Ferreira 1 Braga 1.
Apr 21: Benfica 4 Marítimo 1; Guimarães 3 Uniao Leiria 2; Porto 3 Beira Mar 0.
Apr 22: Gil Vicente 0 Rio Ave 0; Feirense 1 Setúbal 0; Nacional 2 Sporting 3.
Apr 23: Académica 0 O'Hanense 1.

PORTUGAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	27	20	6	1	60	17	66
Benfica	27	19	5	3	60	24	62
Braga	27	18	5	4	55	24	59
Sporting	27	16	5	6	42	21	53
Marítimo	27	14	6	7	40	35	48
Guimarães	27	13	3	11	35	34	42
Nacional	27	10	5	12	39	47	35
O'Hanense	27	7	11	9	32	36	32
Setúbal	27	8	6	13	23	42	30
P. Ferreira	27	8	5	14	32	48	29
Gil Vicente	27	6	10	11	24	37	28
Rio Ave	27	7	5	15	27	33	26
Beira Mar	27	7	5	15	23	35	26
Académica	27	5	8	14	23	35	23
Feirense	27	4	9	14	21	43	21
Uniao Leiria	27	5	4	18	23	48	19

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Mar 30: Shamrock 2 Bohemians 0; Drogheda 2 Derry 0; UCD 3 Monaghan 2; Cork 1 Bray 1; Shelbourne 1 St Patrick's 1.

Mar 31: Sligo 3 Dundalk 0.

Apr 6: St Patrick's 5 Shamrock 1; Bohemians 1 Cork 0; Dundalk 0 Shelbourne 0; Derry 0 UCD 0; Bray 1 Sligo 2; Monaghan 0 Drogheda 1.

Apr 13: Sligo 1 Derry 1; Cork 6 Monaghan 0; Drogheda 0 St Patrick's 0; UCD 1 Bohemians 2; Shamrock 6 Dundalk 0; Shelbourne 2 Bray 1.

Apr 20: Bohemians 1 Monaghan 2; Bray 2 Shamrock 2; Cork 0 Sligo 1; Derry 1 Dundalk 2; Drogheda 3 Shelbourne 1; St Patrick's 2 UCD 0.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sligo	8	6	2	0	12	4	20
Shamrock	8	5	2	1	21	10	17
Drogheda	8	5	2	1	14	7	17
St Patrick's	8	4	4	0	12	3	16
Shelbourne	8	3	3	2	8	10	12
Derry	8	3	2	3	9	6	11
Dundalk	8	2	3	3	4	13	9
UCD	8	2	1	5	9	13	7
Bohemians	8	2	1	5	4	9	7
Cork	8	1	2	5	10	10	5
Bray	8	1	2	5	10	18	5
Monaghan	8	1	1	6	5	16	5

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

ROMANIA

Mar 30: Otetul 3 Voința 0.
Mar 31: Sportul 0 Mioveni 0; Petrolul 2 Brasov 0; Pandurii 1 Steaua 1.

Apr 1: Gaz Metan 0 Astra 0; Rapid 0 Dinamo 0.

Apr 2: Universitatea 3 Tirgu-Mures 1; Concordia 2 Ceahlău 0; Vaslui 1 CFR 1.

Apr 6: Tirgu-Mures 1 Gaz Metan 0.

Apr 7: Voința 3 Vaslui 0; Dinamo 1 Petrolul 3; CFR 0 Rapid 5.

Apr 8: Astra 2 Petrolul 0; Ceahlău 1 Universitatea 1; Steaua 4 Sportul 1.

Apr 9: Brasov 2 Concordia 3; Mioveni 1 Otetul 2.

Apr 13: Ceahlău 1 Brasov 0; Petrolul 1 CFR 1.

Apr 14: Sportul 0 Astra 4; Pandurii 2 Tirgu-Mures 0; Otetul 1 Steaua 2.

Apr 15: Vaslui 3 Mioveni 0; Rapid 3 Voința 0.
Apr 16: Universitatea 3 Gaz Metan 0; Concordia 1 Dinamo 3.
Apr 20: Astra 3 Otetul 1; Steaua 0 Vaslui 1.
Apr 21: Mioveni 1 Rapid 2.
Apr 22: Voința 1 Petrolul 1; CFR 2 Concordia 4; Dinamo 3 Ceahlău 2.
Apr 23: Tirgu-Mures 2 Sportul 1; Gaz Metan 3 Pandurii 2; Brasov 1 Universitatea 1.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	27	15	7	5	45	23	52
CFR	27	15	7	5	48	27	52
Rapid	27	15	6	6	44	23	51
Vaslui	27	15	4	8	43	24	49
Steaua	27	14	7	6	35	20	49
Universitatea	27	10	12	5	38	26	42
Otetul	27	12	6	9	27	24	42
Pandurii	27	10	9	8	39	30	39
Astra	27	10	8	9	31	27	38
Ceahlău	27	8	9	10	26	36	33
Gaz Metan	27	8	7	12	33	41	31
Brasov	27	8	6	13	26	29	30
Tirgu-Mures	27	7	9	11	24	32	30
Concordia	27	8	6	13	28	46	30
Voința	27	7	8	12	18	31	29
Petrolul	27	6	9	12	29	36	27
Sportul	27	5	10	12	27	46	25
Mioveni	27	2	6	19	16	56	12

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

RUSSIA

Division split after 30-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

Championship group

Mar 31: Kuban 1 CSKA 1; Spartak Moscow 1 Zenit 2.

Apr 1: Rubin 1 Anzhi 0; Lokomotiv 0 Dynamo 2.

Apr 7: Dynamo 1 Rubin 1; Lokomotiv 0 Zenit 1; CSKA 0 Anzhi 0.

Apr 8: Spartak 2 Kuban 0.

Apr 14: Kuban 1 Lokomotiv 1; Zenit 2 CSKA 0.

Apr 15: Spartak Moscow 2 Rubin 0; Anzhi 0 Dynamo 1.

Apr 21: Dynamo 1 CSKA 0; Kuban 2 Zenit 2.

Apr 22: Spartak Moscow 0 Anzhi 3; Lokomotiv 0 Rubin 0.

RUSSIA - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	40	22	15	3	77	34	81
Dynamo	40	20	9	11	61	44	69
Spartak M	40	19	11	10	61	43	68
CSKA	40	17	15	8	66	43	66
Lokomotiv	40	18	11	11	56	38	65
Rubin	40	16	15	9	48	34	63
Anzhi	40	17	12	11	46	36	63
Kuban	40	15	12	13	46	41	57

14-round stage (7x2)

Relegation group

Mar 30: Spartak Nalchik 0 Tom 2.

Mar 31: Volga 2 Rostov 0; Krylia Sovetov 1 Krasnodar 1.

Apr 1: Amkar 2 Terek 0.

Apr 6: Volga 0 Krylia Sovetov 0; Terek 2 Spartak Nalchik 0.

Apr 7: Amkar 1 Rostov 0.

Apr 8: Krasnodar 3 Tom 1.

Apr 14: Tom 3 Terek 0; Krylia Sovetov 2 Amkar 1.

Apr 15: Spartak Nalchik 3 Volga 0.

Apr 16: Rostov 1 Krasnodar 1.

Apr 21: Amkar 1 Spartak Nalchik 0; Volga 2 Tom 0.

Apr 22: Terek 0 Krasnodar 1; Krylia Sovetov 2 Rostov 1.

RUSSIA - RELEGATION GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Krasnodar	40	15	11	14	51	53	56
Amkar	40	13	11	16	33	45	50
Terek	40	12	8	20	37	58	44
Rostov	40	11	10	19	40	56	43
Krylia Sovetov	40	10	13	17	29	49	43
Volga	40	12	5	23	34	50	41
Tom	40	7	11	22	27	67	32
Spartak N	40	7	9	24	33	54	30

14-round stage (7x2); bottom 2 will be relegated, 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

SCOTLAND

Regular season

Mar 28: Inverness 0 St Johnstone 1.

Mar 31: Motherwell 1 Rangers 2; Dundee United 3

Dunfermline 0; Hearts 3 Aberdeen 0; St Mirren 4

Kilmarnock 2.

Apr 1: Celtic 2 St Johnstone 0; Inverness 2 Hibernian 3.

Apr 7: Kilmarnock 0 Celtic 6; Aberdeen 3 Dundee

United 1; Dunfermline 1 Hearts 2; Rangers 3 St

Mirren 1; St Johnstone 0 Inverness 0.

Apr 8: Hibernian 1 Motherwell 1.

SCOTLAND - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	33	26	3	4	72	20	81
Rangers*	33	23	4	6	65	25	63
Motherwell	33	16	7	10	43	38	55
St Johnstone	33	14	8	11	42	36	50
Dundee Utd	33	13	10	10	55	43	49
Hearts	33	14	6	13	41	32	48
Kilmarnock	33	8	13	12	36	54	37
Aberdeen	33	8	12	13	32	38	36
St Mirren	33	7	14	12	32	46	35
Inverness	33	8	8	17	36	54	32
Hibernian	33	6	9	18	34	62	27
Dunfermline	33	4	8	21	32	72	20

Top 6 formed championship group, bottom 6 formed relegation group

*10pts deducted for going into administration

● Teams carried forward full regular season record

Championship group

Apr 21: St Johnstone 0 Dundee United 2; Hearts 0

Rangers 3.

Apr 22: Motherwell 0 Celtic 3.

Apr 22: Motherwell 0 Celtic 3.

SCOTLAND - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic (C)	34	27	3	4	75	20	84
Rangers*	34	24	4	6	68	25	66
Motherwell	34	16	7	11	43	41	55
Dundee Utd	34	14	10	10	57	43	52
St Johnstone	34	14	8	12	42	38	50
Hearts	34	14	6	14	41	35	48

5-round stage (5x1)

*10pts deducted for going into administration

Relegation group

Apr 21: Inverness 0 Aberdeen 2; St Mirren 4

Dunfermline 4.

Apr 22: Hibernian 0 Kilmarnock 1.

SCOTLAND - RELEGATION GROUP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kilmarnock	34	9	13	12	37	54	40
Aberdeen	34	9	12	13	34	38	39
St Mirren	34	7	15	12	36	50	36
Inverness	34	8	8	18	36	56	32
Hibernian	34	6	9	19	34	63	27
Dunfermline	34	4	9	21	36	76	21

5-round stage (5x1); bottom team will be relegated

SERBIA

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	25	22	2	1	59	11	68
Red Star	25	18	4	3	50	14	58
Radnicki	25	11	12	2	34	20	45
Vojvodina	25	11	9	5	37	22	42
Jagodina	25	11	8	6	31	19	41
S Sevojno	25	11	5	9	31	31	38
Spartak	25	9	10	6	24	23	37
OFK	25	11	2	12	29	31	35
Rad	25	7	7	11	26	25	28
Hajduk	25	7	6	12	18	32	27
Javor	25	7	5	13	19	30	26
Smeređev	25	8	2	15	18	32	26
BSK	25	5	9	11	15	33	24
Novi Pazar	25	4	9	12	16	34	21
Borac	25	4	6	15	14	35	18
Metalc	25	2	8	15	13	42	14



WALES

Champions eye FA Cup

Welsh Premier League winners The New Saints have applied to enter the English FA Cup next season.

Club chairman Mike Harris believes they should be allowed to follow Welsh exiles Newport County, Wrexham and Merthyr, who played in the English league pyramid, FA Cup

and Welsh Cup this season.

"We thought it only fair that we try to compete in the competitions they compete in," said Harris.

Greg Draper scored a hat-trick as TNS wrapped up the Welsh title with a 5-0 victory against last season's champions Bangor City on the final day of the season. Draper finished the campaign as the league's top scorer with 22 goals.



Fired...Gutierrez is in trouble



ARGENTINA

Gutierrez pulls a gun

Racing president Gaston Cogorno claims Colombian striker Teofilo Gutierrez will never play for the club again after he allegedly pulled an airgun on a team-mate in the wake of the 4-1 defeat to Independiente.

Gutierrez was confronted in the dressing room by captain Sebastian

Saja after he was sent off and he reacted by reaching into his bag for the weapon.

"I believe it is impossible for him to continue at Racing," said Cogorno.



BOLIVIA

National heroes

Bolivar became the first Bolivian team to reach the knockout stage of the Libertadores Cup for 12

Sunday, April 8

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 47)
Sevilla 0 Att: 38,000

Levante 1 (Valdo 1, Kone 10)
Atletico Madrid 0 Att: 11,400

Mallorca 0
Granada 0 Att: 12,762

Real Madrid 0
Valencia 0 Att: 79,000

Monday, April 9

Malaga 3 (Isco 21, Cazorla 64, Van Nistelrooy 84)
Racing Santander 0 Att: 30,000

Tuesday, April 10

Barcelona 4 (Sanchez 13, 73, Messi 44, Pedro 75)
Getafe 0 Att: 76,041

Osasuna 2 (Raul Garcia 53, 69)
Espanyol 0 Att: 15,500

Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 56)
Betis 1 (Ruben Castro 70) Att: 21,000

Wednesday, April 11

Athletic Madrid 1 (Falcao 55)
Real Madrid 4 (Cristiano Ronaldo 25, 68, pen 83, Callejon 87) Att: 54,000

Granada 2 (Jaime Romero 2, Geijo 74)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Llorente 81, Susaeta 88)
Att: 22,500

Sporting Gijon 3 (Trejo 22, Lora 74, Sangoy 84)
Levante 2 (Valdo 16, Kone 63) Att: 74,000

Valencia 4 (Jonas 41, pen 77, Jordi Alba 70, Pablo 88)
Rayo Vallecano 1 (Diego Costa 72) Att: 40,000

Thursday, April 12

Racing Santander 0
Mallorca 3 (Nsue 1, Castro 47, Alfaro 53)
Att: 9,385

Sevilla 3 (Fazio 11, Negredo 29, 43)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 35,000

Villarreal 2 (Senna pen 83, Perez 90+4)
Malaga 1 (Cazorla 65) Att: 15,000

Saturday, April 14

Levante 1 (Barkero pen 23)
Barcelona 2 (Messi 64, pen 72) Att: 24,000

Real Madrid 3 (Higuain 36, Cristiano Ronaldo 74, Benzema 82)
Sporting Gijon 1 (De las Cuevas pen 29)
Att: 75,000

Sunday, April 15

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Llorente 13)
Mallorca 0 Att: 34,000

Betis 1 (Ruben Castro 34)
Osasuna 0 Att: 40,000

Espanyol 4 (Cristian Gomez 26, Verdu 29, Alvaro 58, Uche 80)
Valencia 0 Att: 24,205

Malaga 1 (Isco 19)
Real Sociedad 1 (Xabi Prieto 49) Att: 29,000

Rayo Vallecano 0
Atletico Madrid 1 (Falcao 64) Att: 11,300

Villarreal 1 (Perez 46)
Racing Santander 1 (Acosta 90+3) Att: 18,000

Zaragoza 1 (Dujmovic 6)
Granada 0 Att: 30,000

Monday, April 16

Getafe 5 (Miguel Torres 35, Lacen 49, Fedor 63, 71, Pedro Rios 69)
Sevilla 1 (Negredo 19) Att: 7,000

Tuesday, April 17

Barcelona 1 (Sanchez 70)
Real Madrid 2 (Khedira 17, Cristiano Ronaldo 73)
Att: 98,000

Mallorca 1 (Victor 34)
Zaragoza 0 Att: 12,300

Sevilla 1 (Negredo 21)
Levante 1 (Kone 28) Att: 30,000

Sporting Gijon 2 (Sangoy 18, Bilic 78)
Rayo Vallecano 1 (Labaka 51) Att: 17,500

Wednesday, April 22

Athletic Madrid 3 (Godin 9, Arda 59, 61)
Espanyol 1 (Didac 19) Att: 50,000

Granada 1 (Jara 18)
Getafe 0 Att: 22,500

Racing Santander 0
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Toquero 12) Att: 10,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Vela 85)
Villarreal 1 (Senna 42) Att: 23,000

Valencia 4 (Jonas 6, Feghoul 63, Soldado 86, Piatti 88)
Betis 0 Att: 35,000

Monday, April 23

Osasuna 1 (Nino 53)
Malaga 1 (Cazorla 67) Att: 13,939

SPAIN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	34	28	4	2	109	30	88
Barcelona	34	25	6	3	97	26	81
Valencia	34	15	10	9	54	42	55
Malaga	34	15	7	12	50	47	52
Levante	34	14	7	13	48	47	49
Athletic	34	12	12	10	49	44	48
Atletico	34	13	9	12	47	42	48
Osasuna	34	11	14	9	38	54	47
Sevilla	34	12	10	12	41	39	46
Espanyol	34	12	9	13	44	46	45
Getafe	34	12	9	13	38	45	45
Mallorca	34	11	10	13	36	41	43
Betis	34	12	6	16	40	49	42
Sociedad	34	10	10	14	41	50	40
Rayo	34	12	4	18	50	60	40
Granada	34	11	6	17	31	49	39
Villarreal	34	8	13	13	35	48	37
Gijon	34	8	7	19	35	64	31
Zaragoza	34	8	7	19	29	60	31
Racing	34	4	14	16	24	53	26

38-round season (19x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

Leading scorers

42 Cristiano Ronaldo (Real Madrid)
41 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
22 Radamel Falcao (Atletico Madrid)

SWEDEN

Mar 31: Elfsborg 2 Djurgarden 1; Sundsvall 0
Kalmar 1; GAIS 0 Hacken 0.

Apr 1: AIK 0 Mjallby 0; Syrianska 2

IFK Gothenburg 1.
Apr 2: Orebro 3 Atvidaberg 4; Malmo 0 Gefle 0;
Norrkoping 1 Helsingborg 0.

Apr 6: Gefle 1 Syrianska 1; Atvidaberg 2 GAIS 1.

Apr 7: Hacken 5 Malmo 0; Mjallby 0 Orebro 0.

Apr 8: Djurgarden 1 Sundsvall 0; Helsingborg 2
Elfsborg 1.

Apr 9: IFK Gothenburg 1 Norrkoping 2; Kalmar 1
AIK 2.

Apr 10: Atvidaberg 6 Gefle 1.

Apr 11: Orebro 0 Helsingborg 0; GAIS 0
Djurgarden 0.

Apr 12: Hacken 4 Mjallby 2; Elfsborg 2

Norrkoping 0; Sundsvall 4 Syrianska 0; AIK 1

IFK Gothenburg 1.

Apr 13: Malmo 2 Kalmar 0.

Apr 15: Syrianska 0 AIK 1; Mjallby 2 Atvidaberg 0;

IFK Gothenburg 2 Orebro 2.

Apr 16: Gefle 1 Elfsborg 2; Kalmar 3 Hacken 1;

Norrkoping 2 Sundsvall 2; Helsingborg 1 GAIS 1;

Djurgarden 2 Malmo 3.

Apr 20: Mjallby 4 Djurgarden 3.

Apr 21: Atvidaberg 1 Helsingborg 2; Kalmar 0

Gefle 1.

Apr 22: GAIS 2 Norrkoping 0; AIK 1 Sundsvall 1.

Apr 23: Hacken 1 IFK Gothenburg 2; Malmo 2

Syrianska 0; Orebro 0 Elfsborg 2.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elfsborg	5	4	0	1	9	4	12
Malmo	5	3	1	1	7	7	10
Atvidaberg	5	3	0	2	13	9	9
AIK	5	2	3	0	5	3	9
Mjallby	5	2	2	1	8	7	8
Helsingborg	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
Hacken	5	2	1	2	11	7	7
Norrkoping	5	2	1	2	5	7	7
GAIS	5	1	3	1	4	3	6
Kalmar	5	2	0	3	5	6	6
Sundsvall	5	1	2	2	7	5	5
IFK Goth'burg	5	1	2	2	7	8	5
Gefle	5	1	2	2	4	9	5
Djurgarden	5	1	1	3	7	9	4
Syrianska	5	1	1	3	3	9	4
Orebro	5	0	3	2	5	8	3

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated,
3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SWITZERLAND

Mar 31: Grasshopper 0 Sion 2; Thun 2 Basle 3.

Apr 1: Zurich 2 Young Boys 2; Lausanne 3

Servette 1.

Apr 4: Lausanne 0 Basle 2.

Apr 7: Lucerne 1 Basle 1; Sion 2 Zurich 1.

Apr 9: Young Boys 1 Lausanne 3; Servette 0

Thun 2.

Apr 14: Lausanne 1 Thun 0; Young Boys 2

Grasshopper 2.

Apr 15: Servette 2 Sion 2; Zurich 0 Lucerne 0.

Apr 21: Lucerne 3 Servette 1; Thun 0

Grasshopper 0.

Apr 22: Sion 0 Basle 3; Zurich 2 Lausanne 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	28	18	8	2	60	23	62
Lucerne	29	12	10	7	36	24	46
Young Boys	28	10	10	8	41	31	40
Thun	29	10	8	11	31	32	38
Zurich	29	9	8	12	37	35	35
Servette	29	10	5	14	37	51	35
Grasshopper	28	7	4	17	24	49	25
Lausanne	29	6	5	18	23	54	23
Sion*	29	14	7	8	35	25	13
Xamax (R)**	18	7	5	6	22	22	26

34-round season (8x4 + 2 v Xamax); bottom team will
be relegated, 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off
*36pts deducted for fielding ineligible players in 12
league games

**Xamax had licence revoked during winter break
after failing to submit the required financial
documents. They will be demoted at the end of the
season. Their results up to the winter break (18
rounds) stood; remaining matches cancelled

TURKEY

Regular season

Mar 30: Mersin 0 Karabukspor 2; Gaziantepspor 1

Ankaragucu 0.

Mar 31: Kayserispor 2 Eskisehirspor 2;

Genclerbirligi 3 Manisaspor 0; Sivasspor 0 Istanbul

BB 1; Galatasaray 2 Orduspor 0.

Apr 1: Antalyaspor 1 Bursaspor 3; Besiktas 0

Samsunspor 1; Trabzonspor 1 Fenerbahce 1.

Apr 6: Karabukspor 1 Besiktas 1.

Apr 7: Ankaragucu 0 Kayserispor 5; Bursaspor 0

Gaziantepspor 2; Fenerbahce 2 Antalyaspor 0;

Samsunspor 1 Sivasspor 2; Eskisehirspor 2 Mersin

0; Istanbul BB 1 Genclerbirligi 0.

Apr 8: Orduspor 0 Trabzonspor 0; Manisaspor 0

Galatasaray 4.

TURKEY - REGULAR - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Galatasaray	34	23	8	3	69	24	77
Fenerbahce	34	20	8	6	61	34	68
Trabzonspor	34	15	11	8	60	39	56
Besiktas	34	15	10	9	50	39	55
Eskisehirspor	34	14	8	12	42	41	50
Istanbul BB	34	14	8	12	48	49	50
Sivasspor	34	13	11	10	57	54	50
Bursaspor	34	13	10	11	44	35	49
Genclerbirligi	34	13	10	11	49	48	49
Gaziantepspor	34	13	9	12	39	38	48
Kayserispor	34	13	5	16	42	39	44
Karabukspor	34	13	5	16	44	56	44
Mersin	34	12	6	16	34	45	42
Orduspor	34	10	12	12	28	34	42
Antalyaspor	34	10	9	15	32	42	39
Samsun'or (R)	34	9	9	16	36	47	36
Manisa'or (R)	34	8	8	18	31	52	32
Ankar'cu (R)	34	2	5	27	27	77	11

Top 4 formed championship group, 5th to 8th formed
Europa League-place group, bottom 3 were relegated

● Teams carried forward half the points (rounded
up) gained during regular season

Championship group

Apr 15: Fenerbahce 2 Trabzonspor 0.

Apr 16: Besiktas 0 Galatasaray 2.

Apr 21: Trabzonspor 1 Besiktas 0.

Apr 22: Galatasaray 1 Fenerbahce 2.

years after they beat Universidad Católica de Chile 3-0.



Boca beaten at home

Fluminense lost at home in continental club competition for the first time in 27 years when Argentina's Boca Juniors beat them 2-0 in the Libertadores Cup.

It brought to an end a

run of 32 games, stretching back to 1985 when they lost to Argentinos Juniors.

Despite the defeat, Fluminense still qualified from the group phase. They are joined by Corinthians, Vasco da Gama, Santos and Internacional, meaning that for the fifth year in succession Brazil will have five representatives in the knock-out stage.

Five Vasco da Gama

players were sent off after the 2-1 home defeat by Flamengo in the Rio state Championship.

Incensed when Ronaldinho scored the visitors' winner from the penalty spot in the second minute of extra time, Vasco players surrounded the referee, who had to be protected by military police as order was restored.

Diego Souza, Felipe

Bastos, Fagner, Rodolfo and Eduardo Costa were all handed red cards.



VENEZUELA

Record run ends

Deportivo Lara's record-equaling run of 28 games unbeaten in the league ended with a 1-0 loss at Deportivo Anzoátegui. Carlos Lopez scored the streak-ending goal.



Clash...Fluminense's Diguinho (right) and Boca's Walter Erviti

TURKEY - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		
Galatasaray	2	1	0	1	3	2	42		
Fenerbahce	2	2	0	0	4	1	40		
Trabzonspor	2	1	0	1	1	2	31		
Besiktas	2	0	0	2	0	3	28		

6-round stage (3x2)

UKRAINE

Mar 30: Metalurh 0 Volyn 3.

Mar 31: Tavriya 0 Dnipro 2; Zorya 2 Illichivets 2; Obolon 2 Karpaty 0.

Apr 1: Oleksandria 1 Arsenal 2; Vorskla 0 Shakhtar 2; Dynamo 3 Chornomorets 1; Metalist 1 Kryvbas 1.

Apr 6: Volyn 0 Vorskla 0; Arsenal 4 Obolon 1.

Apr 7: Shakhtar 2 Dynamo 0; Karpaty 0 Metalurh 2; Chornomorets 2 Zorya 3.

Apr 8: Illichivets 0 Tavriya 2; Kryvbas 1 Oleksandria 2.

Apr 9: Dnipro 2 Metalist 2.

Apr 13: Obolon 0 Kryvbas 0.

Apr 14: Oleksandria 1 Dnipro 5; Dynamo 3 Vorskla 0; Metalist 0 Illichivets 0.

Apr 16: Metalurh 1 Arsenal 1; Karpaty 1 Volyn 0;

Tavriya 2 Chornomorets 0; Zorya 1 Shakhtar 5.

Apr 20: Illichivets 2 Oleksandria 0.

Apr 21: Dnipro 2 Obolon 2; Kryvbas 1 Metalurh 2;

Shakhtar 3 Tavriya 1.

Apr 22: Vorskla 2 Zorya 2; Arsenal 3 Karpaty 2;

Chornomorets 3 Metalist 3; Volyn 0 Dynamo 1.

UKRAINE									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		
Shakhtar	28	23	4	1	75	17	73		
Dynamo	28	23	4	1	55	11	73		
Metalist	28	16	10	2	51	28	58		
Dnipro	28	13	7	8	47	35	46		
Arsenal	28	12	9	7	39	27	45		
Tavriya	27	12	7	8	41	32	43		
Metalurh	27	12	5	10	33	28	41		
Vorskla	28	8	9	11	34	41	33		
Kryvbas	28	9	6	13	22	34	33		
Chornomorets	28	8	7	13	28	41	31		
Illichivets	28	7	7	14	26	41	28		
Volyn	28	7	5	16	23	38	26		
Zorya	28	6	6	16	32	56	24		
Karpaty	28	4	8	16	25	49	20		
Obolon	28	4	8	16	17	41	20		
Oleksandria	28	4	8	16	23	52	20		

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

WALES

Division split after 22-round regular season; teams carried forward full regular season record

WALES - CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP - FINAL									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		
New Saints (C)	32	23	5	4	75	31	74		
Bangor	32	22	3	7	72	45	69		
Neath	32	18	8	6	60	36	62		
Llanelli	32	18	5	9	63	37	59		
Bala	32	14	7	11	48	41	49		
Prestatyn	32	8	4	20	41	63	28		

WALES - RELEGATION GROUP - FINAL									
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts		
Airbus UK	32	10	9	13	48	50	39		
Aberystwyth*	32	8	10	14	45	50	33		
Port Talbot	32	8	9	15	39	51	33		
Afan Lido	32	7	11	14	40	55	32		
Carmarthen (R)†	32	10	2	20	33	67	32		
Newtown** (R)†	32	7	5	20	44	82	23		

*1pt deducted for fielding ineligible player

**3pts deducted for fielding ineligible players

†Relegation provisional - dependent on licence status of other clubs in top 2 divisions

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group 1

Apr 4

Internacional (Bra) 1 (Nei 8)

Santos (Bra) 1 (Alan Kardec 64)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Ricci (Bra)

Sent off: Rodrigo Moledo (Internacional) 88min

Apr 5

Juan Aurich (Per) 1 (Araujo 20)

The Strongest (Bol) 0

HT: 1-0. Ref: Intriago (Ecu)

Apr 19

Juan Aurich 1 (Tejada 14)

Internacional 0

HT: 1-0. Ref: Escalante (Ven)

Apr 19

Santos 2 (Alan Kardec 85, Neymar 87)

The Strongest 0

HT: 0-0. Ref: Quintana (Par)

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 1 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos (Q)	6	4	1	1	12	5	13
Internac'l (Q)	6	2	2	2	10	6	8
The Strongest	6	2	1	3	5	11	7
Juan Aurich	6	2	0	4	4	9	6

Group 2

Mar 28

Olimpia (Par) 3 (Orteman 6, Zeballos 52, Aranda 70)

Flamengo (Bra) 2 (Vagner Love 48, Bottinelli 77)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Osses (Chl)

Apr 3

Lanus (Arg) 6 (Pavone 13, 54, Camoranesi 29,

Regueiro 70, Valeri 77, Romero 84)

Olimpia 0

HT: 2-0. Ref: Rivera (Per)

Apr 4

Emelec (Ecu) 3 (Figueroa 33, 82, Gaibor pen 90)

Flamengo 2 (Leo Moura 8, Deivid 42)

HT: 1-2. Ref: Vazquez (Uru)

Apr 12

Flamengo 3 (Wellington 17, Deivid 41, Luiz Antonio 49)

Lanus 0

HT: 2-0. Ref: Roldan (Col)

Apr 12

Olimpia 2 (Castorino 45+1, Zeballos 90+1)

Emelec 3 (Mondalini 67, Mena 87, J L Quinonez 90+2)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Silvera (Uru)

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 2 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lanus (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	6	10
Emelec (Q)	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Flamengo	6	2	2	2	12	10	8
Olimpia	6	2	1	3	10	16	7

Group 3

Mar 28

Universidad Católica (Chl) 2 (Ovelar 7, Gazale 87)

Union Espanola (Chl) 1 (Villagra 85)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Polic (Chl)

Sent off: Campos Toro (Univ Catolica) 78min

Apr 4

Atletico Junior (Col) 3 (Velez 45, Paez 85,

Hernandez 90)

Universidad Católica 0

HT: 1-0. Ref: De Oliveira (Bra)

Apr 10

Union Espanola 2 (Leal 17, Herrera 66)

Bolivar (Bol) 1 (Cantero 82)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Lopes (Bra)

Apr 17

Atletico Junior 2 (Cardenas pen 22, Paez pen 34)

Union Espanola 1 (Vecchio 12)

HT: 2-1. Ref: Belgioy (Arg)

Sent off: Rodriguez (Junior) 29min

Apr 17

Bolivar 3 (Andia og 2, Flores 27, Lizio 48)

Universidad Católica 0

HT: 2-0. Ref: Vera (Ecu)

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 3 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
U Espanola (Q)	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Bolivar (Q)	6	3	1	2	9	7	10
At Junior	6	2	1	3	8	8	7
Univ Catolica	6	1	3	2	6	11	6

Group 4

Mar 29

Boca Juniors (Arg) 2 (Ledesma 49, Sanchez Mino 88)

Arsenal (Arg) 0

HT: 0-0. Ref: Loustau (Arg)

Sent off: Somoza (Boca) 37min

Mar 29

Zamora (Ven) 0

Fluminense (Bra) 1 (Rafael Sobis 77)

HT: 0-0. Ref: Vera (Ecu)

Apr 10

Zamora 0

Arsenal 1 (Caffa pen 29)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Quintana (Par)

Apr 11

Fluminense 0

Boca Juniors 2 (Cvitanich 33, Sanchez Mino 74)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Ubrlaco (Uru)

Apr 18

Arsenal 1 (Aguirre 80)

Fluminense 2 (Carlinhos 34, Rafael Moura 90+2)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Silvera (Uru)

Sent off: Campestrini (Arsenal) 85min

Apr 18

Boca Juniors 2 (Blandi 67, Riquelme 74)

Zamora 0

HT: 0-0. Ref: Orosco (Bol)

Sent off: D Rodriguez (Zamora) 80min

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 4 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fluminense (Q)	6	5	0	1	7	4	15
Boca (Q)	6	4	1	1	9	3	13
Arsenal	6	2	0	4	6	7	6
Zamora	6	0	1	5	0	8	1

Group 5

Mar 27

Nacional (Uru) 1 (Viudez 68)

Alianza Lima (Per) 0

HT: 0-0. Ref: Pitana (Arg)

Apr 3

Alianza Lima 1 (Curiel 76)

Vasco da Gama (Bra) 2 (Fellipe Bastos 17, 70)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Laverni (Arg)

Sent off: Nilton (Vasco) 90+2min

Apr 5

Libertad (Par) 2 (Velazquez 65, Caceres 90)

Nacional 1 (Viudez 9)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Ponce (Ecu)

Apr 12

Alianza Lima 1 (Hurtado 22)

Libertad 2 (Camacho 53, Nunez 74)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Soto (Ven)

Apr 12

Nacional 0

Vasco da Gama 1 (Diego Souza 56)

HT: 0-0. Ref: Lunati (Arg)



EGYPT

No more competitions

The domestic cup has gone the way of the league and been cancelled because of security concerns.



NAMIBIA

Holders retain title

Black Africa from the capital, Windhoek, retained the Premier League title

with a 2-1 victory over Orlando Pirates.



TANZANIA

Cup makes comeback

The Tanzania FA will revive the domestic knockout cup competition next season. The winners of the tournament, which was last staged in 2010, will compete in the 2014 CAF Confederation Cup.



Joy...Brisbane's Besart Berisha



AUSTRALIA

Back-to-back titles

Brisbane Roar are the first side to retain the A-League title, beating Perth Glory 2-1 in the Grand Final.

Gold Coast United, who finished last in the regular season table, will be replaced by a new team from Western Sydney next season. Gold Coast United played their final four games

this term under league administration after owner Clive Palmer lost his licence after speaking out against the league's management.



INDIA

Draw seals it

A goalless draw against East Bengal secured a fifth I-League title for Dempo.

"My team worked hard for the title, we gelled well

Group 7

Mar 28

Defensor Sporting (Uru) 1 (Olivera 70)

Guadalajara (Mex) 0

HT: 0-0. Ref: Caceres (Par)

Sent off: Nava (Guadalajara) 39min

Apr 10

Deportivo Quito (Ecu) 2 (Checa 36, Bevacqua 63)

Defensor Sporting 0

HT: 1-0. Ref: Carrillo (Per)

Sent off: Pintos (Defensor) 54min

Apr 11

Guadalajara 0

Velez Sarsfield (Arg) 2 (Fernandez 69, Pratto 89)

HT: 0-0. Ref: Gambetta (Per)

Apr 17

Deportivo Quito 5 (Alustiza 17, 27, 70, 86, Martinez 64)

Guadalajara 0

HT: 2-0. Ref: Roldan (Col)

Sent off: Enriquez (Guadalajara) 57min

Apr 17

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Insua pen 63)

Defensor Sporting 3 (Olivera 6, Diego Martin Rodriguez 37, Britos 46)

HT: 0-2. Ref: Ricci (Bra)

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 7 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Velez (Q)	6	4	0	2	10	6	12
Dep Quito (Q)	6	3	1	2	11	4	10
Defensor	6	3	0	3	6	7	9
Guadalajara	6	1	1	4	2	12	4

Group 8

Mar 27

Universidad de Chile (Chi) 2 (Rodriguez 2, 90+1)

Penarol (Uru) 1 (Valdez 51)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Vuaden (Bra)

Apr 4

Godoy Cruz (Arg) 0

Universidad de Chile 1 (Henriquez 45+2)

HT: 0-1. Ref: Amarilla (Par)

Apr 10

Atletico Nacional (Col) 3 (Murillo 7, Pabon 44, Alvarez 59)

Penarol 0

HT: 2-0. Ref: Antequera (Bol)

Apr 19

Penarol 4 (Zambrana 37, 73, Mora 50, Perez 61)

Godoy Cruz 2 (N Sanchez 12, Sevillano 19)

HT: 1-2. Ref: Marques Ribeiro (Bra)

Apr 19

Universidad de Chile 2 (Rodriguez 10, Gonzalez 67)

Atletico Nacional 1 (Pabon 62)

HT: 1-0. Ref: Rivera (Per)

LIBERTADORES CUP - GROUP 8 - FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Chile (Q)	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
At Nacional (Q)	6	3	2	1	16	8	11
Godoy Cruz	6	1	2	3	10	16	5
Penarol	6	1	1	4	6	13	4

Top 2 in each group qualified for 1st knockout round

ARGENTINA

Clausura

Mar 30: Lanus 0 Belgrano 1.

Mar 31: Olimpo 2 Banfield 5; Tigre 1 Argentinos 2;

Independiente 2 Rafaela 0; Union 1 Godoy Cruz 1.

Apr 1: San Lorenzo 0 Velez 2; All Boys 0 Arsenal 2;

San Martin 2 Colon 2; Newell's 2 Racing 0;

Estudiantes 0 Boca 3.

Apr 6: Velez 1 Independiente 1; Arsenal 2 Olimpo 1.

Apr 7: Banfield 2 Union 2; Colon 1 Lanus 0; Boca 2

Argentinos 1; Rafaela 3 San Martin 1; All Boys 2

Tigre 0.

Apr 8: Godoy Cruz 1 Newell's 1; Belgrano 2

Estudiantes 1.

Apr 9: Racing 1 San Lorenzo 1.

Apr 13: Estudiantes 2 Colon 2.

Apr 14: Independiente 4 Racing 1; Olimpo 1 All

Boys 2; San Martin 1 Velez 3; San Lorenzo 3 Godoy

Cruz 0.

Apr 15: Newell's 3 Banfield 0; Argentinos 0

Belgrano 0; Union 1 Arsenal 0; Tigre 2 Boca 1.

Apr 16: Lanus 1 Rafaela 0.

Apr 20: Tigre 1 Olimpo 0.

Apr 21: Colon 1 Argentinos 0; Rafaela 3

Estudiantes 2; Velez 0 Lanus 0; Racing 1 San

Martin 0.

Apr 22: All Boys 2 Union 1; Banfield 1 San Lorenzo

1; Godoy Cruz 0 Independiente 0; Belgrano 1

Boca 1.

Apr 23: Arsenal 1 Newell's 1.

ARGENTINA - CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca	11	6	3	2	20	11	21
Newell's	11	6	3	2	14	7	21
Velez	11	5	5	1	18	9	20
Tigre	11	6	2	3	13	8	20
Arsenal	11	5	4	2	12	8	19
All Boys	11	5	4	2	10	8	19
Colon	11	4	5	2	15	13	17
Estudiantes	11	4	4	3	14	16	16
Belgrano	11	4	4	3	10	11	16
Union	11	3	6	2	15	11	15
Independiente	11	4	2	5	15	16	14
Rafaela	11	4	1	6	14	15	13
San Lorenzo	11	3	4	4	12	15	13
Argentinos	11	3	3	5	9	10	12
Racing	11	3	3	5	10	13	12
Lanus	11	3	2	6	9	11	11
Godoy Cruz	11	1	7	3	7	12	10
Banfield	11	2	4	5	11	20	10
San Martin	11	2	3	6	11	17	9
Olimpo	11	2	1	8	12	22	7

19-round tournament (19x1); the 2 teams with the lowest average points tallies over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated, the teams with 3rd & 4th lowest average tallies will enter rel/prom play-offs

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals

1st legs - Mar 28; 2nd legs - Apr 4

Monterrey (Mex) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)

3-0, 1-1 (agg 4-1)

Toronto (Can) v Santos Laguna (Mex)

1-1, 2-6 (agg 3-7)

Final

1st leg

Apr 19

Monterrey 2 (Suazo 60, 86)

Santos Laguna 0

HT: 0-0. Att: 29,300. Ref: Chacon (Mex)

Monterrey: Orozco - Basanta, Meza, Chavez, Mier,

L Perez, Zavala (Carreno 58), Reyna, Suazo,

Cardozo (Ayovi 71), De Nigris (Morales 89).

Santos: Sanchez - Baloy, Galindo, Estrada, Mares,

Rodriguez, Marc Crosas (Salinas 87), Ramirez

(Morales 62), Gomez, Quintero (Luduena 82),

Suarez.

MEXICO

Clausura

Regular season

Mar 30: Pachuca 1 Tijuana 0.

Mar 31: Cruz Azul 3 San Luis 1; Queretaro 0

Puebla 1; Tigres 4 Morelia 1; Atlas 0 Pumas 0;

Atlante 2 Jaguares 2.

Apr 1: Toluca 1 Santos 3; America 2 Monterrey 3;

Tecos 1 Guadalajara 0.

Apr 6: Morelia 0 Atlas 0.

Apr 7: San Luis 2 Jaguares 3; Santos 1 Tecos 1;

Tijuana 2 Atlante 1; Monterrey 2 Tigres 0.

Apr 8: Pumas 0 Pachuca 1; Puebla 2 Toluca 1;

Cruz Azul 1 Queretaro 2; Guadalajara 0 America 1.

Apr 13: Tecos 1 Puebla 1; Jaguares 0 Tijuana 0.

Apr 14: Queretaro 2 San Luis 2; America 3 Santos

1; Pachuca 1 Morelia 2; Tigres 2 Guadalajara 1;

Atlas 1 Monterrey 0; Atlante 1 Pumas 2.

Apr 15: Toluca 0 Cruz Azul 3.

Apr 20: Morelia 1 Atlante 1.

Apr 21: Cruz Azul 5 Tecos 2; Queretaro 2 Toluca 2;

San Luis 0 Tijuana 1; Santos 3 Tigres 0;

Guadalajara 0 Atlas 1; Monterrey 1 Pachuca 1.

Apr 22: Pumas 0 Jaguares 3; Puebla 2 America 3.

MEXICO - CLAUSURA: REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos (Q)	16	10	3	3	30	17	33
America (Q)	16	9	4	3	28	16	31
Morelia (Q)	16	9	4	3	25	17	31
Tigres (Q)	16	9	4	3	21	14	31
Monterrey (Q)	16	8	5	3	29	15	29
Tijuana	16	7	6	3	17	10	27
Pachuca	16	6	7	3	21	16	25
Cruz Azul	16	6	6	4	27	19	24
Jaguares	16	7	3	6	25	20	24
Atlas	16	4	8	4	6	10	20
Toluca	16	5	4	7	22	26	19
Puebla	16	4	4	8	17	22	16
Atlante	16	4	4	8	20	28	16
Pumas	16	3	6	7	12	17	15
Guadalajara	16	4	3	9	11	18	15
San Luis	16	3	3	10	14	28	12
Queretaro	16	2	5	9	13	29	11
Tecos	16	2	5	9	11	27	11

17-round regular season (17x1); top 8 will enter championship play-offs; the team with the lowest average points tally over the 3 most recent seasons will be relegated

UNITED STATES

Regular season

Mar 30: DC United 4 Dallas 1.

Mar 31: Toronto 0 Columbus 1; Philadelphia 0

Vancouver 0; New York 5 Montreal 2; Seattle 0 San

Jose 1; Portland 2 Salt Lake 3; Los Angeles 1 New

England 3.

Apr 1: Colorado 2 Chicago 0; Chivas 0 Kansas

City 1.

Apr 4: Salt Lake 1 Montreal 0.

Apr 5: Dallas 1 New England 0.

Apr 7: Montreal 2 Toronto 1; Columbus 1 New York

4; Kansas City 1 Los Angeles 0; San Jose 3

Vancouver 1; DC United 0 Colorado 0; Salt Lake 2

Colorado 0; Portland 1 Chivas 2.

Apr 14: Philadelphia 1 Columbus 0; New England

1 DC United 2; Seattle 1 Colorado 0; Toronto 0

Chivas 1; New York 2 San Jose 2; Dallas 2 Montreal 1;

Kansas City 1 Salt Lake 0; Los Angeles 3 Portland 1.

Apr 15: Chicago 1 Houston 1.

Apr 18: DC United 1 Montreal 1; Vancouver 1

Kansas City 3.

Apr 21: Toronto 2 Chicago 3; Columbus 2 Houston

2; Colorado 1 Los Angeles 2; Vancouver 1 Dallas 0;

Portland 1 Kansas City 0; Chivas 0 Philadelphia 1;

San Jose 3 Salt Lake 1.

Apr 22: DC United 4 New York 1.

USA - REGULAR: EASTERN CONFERENCE

Kansas City	8	7	0	1	12	3	21
DC United	8	3	3	2	12	8	12
New York	7	3	1	3	17	14	10
Chicago	5	2	2	1	6	6	8
Houston	5	2	2	1	5	5	8
Philadelphia	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Columbus	6	2	1	3	6	9	7
New England	6	2	0	4	5	8	6
Montreal	8	1	2	5	7	15	5
Tampa	6	0	0	6	4	12	0

as a team," said coach Armando Calaco, whose side will now enter the 2013 AFC Cup.



IRAN

Pulling power

Persepolis broke their own AFC Champions League attendance record with a crowd of 96,200 spectators for their 1-1 draw against Al Gharafa of Qatar.



SAUDI ARABIA

Top two showdown

Al Shabab clinched the Saudi Pro League title with a 1-1 draw against closest challengers Al Ahli on the final day of the season. The league's top scorer Naser Al Shamrani scored his 21st goal of the season to give his side the point they needed to finish two points clear.



Going through...Al Jazeera



UAE

First to qualify

Al Jazeera became the first team to book their place in the AFC Champions League round of 16. They are the first club from the UAE to progress to the knockout stage since Al Wahda five years ago.

Al Jazeera also retained the President's Cup, beating Bani Yas 3-1 in the Final.

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Apr 3: Al Rayyan (Qat) 3 Nasaf (Uzb) 1; Esteghlal (Iran) 1 Al Jazeera (UAE) 2.
Apr 18: Al Jazeera 1 Esteghlal 1; Nasaf 0 Al Rayyan 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Jazeera	4	3	1	0	10	6	10
Al Rayyan	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Esteghlal	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Nasaf	4	0	1	3	3	8	1

Group B

Apr 4: Al Ittihad (Sau) 1 Bani Yas (UAE) 0; Pakhtakor (Uzb) 3 Al Arabi (Qat) 1.
Apr 17: Al Arabi 0 Pakhtakor 1; Bani Yas 0 Al Ittihad 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad	4	3	1	0	8	1	10
Pakhtakor	4	2	1	1	5	6	7
Bani Yas	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
Al Arabi	4	0	0	4	2	9	0

Group C

Apr 3: Al Nasr (UAE) 1 Al Ahli (Sau) 2; Sepahan (Iran) 2 Lekhwiya (Qat) 1.
Apr 18: Al Ahli 3 Al Nasr 1; Lekhwiya 1 Sepahan 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahli	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Sepahan	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Lekhwiya	4	2	0	2	4	6	6
Al Nasr	4	1	0	3	4	7	3

Group D

Apr 4: Al Gharafa (Qat) 0 Persepolis (Iran) 3; Al Shabab (UAE) 1 Al Hilal (Sau) 1.
Apr 17: Al Hilal 2 Al Shabab 1; Persepolis 1 Al Gharafa 1.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Persepolis	4	2	2	0	11	3	8
Al Hilal	4	1	3	0	7	6	6
Al Gharafa	4	0	3	1	4	7	3
Al Shabab	4	0	2	2	3	9	2

Group E

Apr 3: Gamba Osaka (Jap) 3 Bunyodkor (Uzb) 1; Pohang Steelers (SCO) 1 Adelaide United (Aus) 0.
Apr 18: Adelaide United 1 Pohang Steelers 0; Bunyodkor 3 Gamba Osaka 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Adelaide	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Bunyodkor	4	2	0	2	7	6	6
Pohang	4	2	0	2	4	3	6
Gamba	4	1	0	3	5	9	3

Group F

Apr 4: Beijing Guoan (Chn) 1 Tokyo (Jap) 1; Ulsan Hyundai (SCO) 1 Brisbane Roar (Aus) 1.
Apr 17: Brisbane Roar 1 Ulsan Hyundai 2; Tokyo 3 Beijing Guoan 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tokyo	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
Ulsan	4	2	2	0	7	5	8
Brisbane	4	0	2	2	3	6	2
Beijing	4	0	2	2	3	7	2

Group G

Apr 3: Central Coast Mariners (Aus) 1 Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma (SCO) 1; Tianjin Teda (Chn) 0 Nagoya Grampus (Jap) 3.
Apr 18: Nagoya Grampus 0 Tianjin Teda 0; Seongnam Ilhwa Chunma 5 Central Coast Mariners 0.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seongnam	4	1	3	0	9	4	6
Nagoya	4	1	3	0	6	3	6
Tianjin	4	0	3	1	1	4	3
Central Coast	4	0	3	1	2	7	3

Group H

Apr 4: Buriram United (Tha) 0 Jeonbuk Motors (SCO) 2; Kashiwa Reysol (Jap) 0 Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn) 0.
Apr 17: Guangzhou Evergrande 3 Kashiwa Reysol 1; Jeonbuk Motors 3 Buriram United 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guangzhou	4	2	1	1	9	4	7
Jeonbuk	4	2	0	2	7	12	6
Buriram	4	2	0	2	7	8	6
Kashiwa	4	1	1	2	8	7	4

Remaining matchdays May 1/2, May 15/16

Top 2 in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

AUSTRALIA

Championship play-offs

Elimination finals
(for teams placed 3rd to 6th in regular season)
Mar 30: Wellington 3 Sydney 2.

Apr 1: Perth 3 Melbourne Heart 0.

Winners entered minor semi-final, losers eliminated

Minor semi-final

Apr 7: Perth 3 Wellington 2 (aet).
Winner entered Grand Final qualifier, loser eliminated

Major semi-final

(for teams placed 1st and 2nd in regular season)
1st leg - Mar 31; 2nd leg - Apr 8
Brisbane v Central Coast 2-0, 3-2 (agg 5-2)
Winner entered Grand Final, loser entered Grand Final qualifier

Grand Final qualifier

Apr 14: Central Coast 1 Perth 1 (aet, Perth 5-3 on pens).
Winner entered Grand Final, loser eliminated

Grand Final

Apr 22 - Brisbane (Suncorp)
Brisbane 2 (Berisha 84, pen 90+4)
Perth 1 (Frantic og 51)

HT: 0-0. Att: 50,334. Ref: Gillett
Sent off: Heffernan (Perth) 90+1min

JAPAN

Mar 31: Omiya 1 Nagoya 1; Tokyo 0 Sanfrecce 1; Cerezo 1 Vegalta 2; Jubilo 1 Kashiwa 0; Urawa 1 Kawasaki 1; Albirex 1 Gamba 1; Shimizu 1 Consadole 0; Sagan 3 Vissel 0; Yokohama 0 Kashima 0.

Apr 7: Vissel 0 Shimizu 1; Nagoya 1 Sagan 0; Vegalta 2 Jubilo 2; Consadole 0 Kashiwa 0; Albirex 0 Yokohama 0; Omiya 0 Cerezo 3; Kashima 1 Urawa 3; Sanfrecce 4 Gamba 1.

Apr 8: Kawasaki 0 Tokyo 1.

Apr 14: Kashiwa 2 Vegalta 3; Tokyo 1 Kashima 2; Yokohama 1 Omiya 1; Urawa 2 Vissel 0; Shimizu 3 Jubilo 2; Nagoya 3 Consadole 1; Sagan 1 Sanfrecce 0; Gamba 3 Kawasaki 2; Cerezo 0 Albirex 1.

Apr 21: Consadole 2 Kawasaki 3; Jubilo 1 Yokohama 0; Vissel 3 Kashiwa 1; Sanfrecce 1 Nagoya 1; Kashima 3 Cerezo 2; Sagan 1 Albirex 0; Omiya 2 Urawa 0; Vegalta 4 Tokyo 0.

Apr 22: Gamba 3 Shimizu 1.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Vegalta	7	6	1	0	18	6	19
Nagoya	7	4	2	1	11	7	14
Jubilo	7	4	2	1	10	7	14
Sanfrecce	7	4	1	2	10	5	13
Sagan	7	4	1	2	7	3	13
Urawa	7	4	1	2	9	6	13
Shimizu	7	4	0	3	9	9	12
Tokyo	7	4	0	3	8	9	12
Cerezo	7	3	1	3	9	7	10
Kawasaki	7	3	1	3	8	8	10
Vissel	7	3	0	4	8	12	9
Omiya	7	2	2	3	7	11	8
Kashiwa	7	2	1	4	10	12	7
Gamba	7	2	1	4	12	15	7
Kashima	7	2	1	4	6	10	7
Albirex	7	1	2	4	4	7	5
Yokohama	7	0	4	3	4	8	4
Consadole	7	0	1	6	5	13	1

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Mar 31: Waitakere United (NZ) 4 Mont-Dore (NC) 0.
Apr 15: Ba (FIJ) 0 Tefana (Tah) 5.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tefana (Q)	6	4	1	1	15	12	13
Waitakere	6	4	0	2	21	6	12
Ba	6	3	0	3	7	16	9
Mont-Dore	6	0	1	5	2	11	1

Group B

Mar 31: Amicale (Van) 1 Auckland City (NZ) 0; Koloale (Sol) 1 Hekari United (PNG) 2.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland (Q)	6	4	1	1	17	8	13
Hekari	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Amicale	6	2	1	3	6	7	7
Koloale	6	1	0	5	7	18	3

Group winners qualified for Final

KEY TO TABLES

(C) = champions (R) = relegated (Q) = qualified



Summer 2012 Vol 52 No 9

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Thanks this issue to

Mike Hughes, Debbie Millitt, Peter Neuh, Dave Rallis

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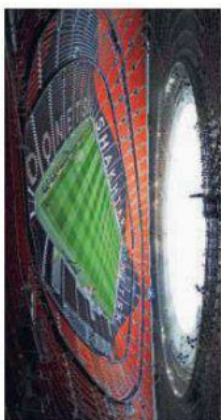
● Titan Sport (China) ● KickOff (S Africa)
Netease (China) ● SportKorea (S Korea)

All kick-off times are local. In Poland, British Summer Time is minus 1 hour; in Ukraine, BST is minus 2 hours

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a large sports stadium, likely during a night event. The stadium is packed with spectators, and the field is brightly lit by a powerful light source, creating a strong glare. The surrounding area is dark, suggesting an urban environment at night.

FINAL

Kiev: 70,050



Donetsk: 51,504



Kharkiv: 38,863



Lviv: 34,915

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