

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS HISTORY

Category : History and Statistics

Published by [Kcachia](#) on 2007/1/10

1960: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Travel back in time as we take a look at the history of the European Championships, following the tournament's development into the third highest-profile event in the sporting world. Our first destination is 1960, with the final four descending on France to decide the inaugural winners.

The European Championships, along with the World Cup and modern Olympic Games, were the brainchild of a Frenchman. Henri Delaunay's sterling work in getting the tournament off the ground was recognised in the naming of the trophy after the great man.

Just four teams arrived in France for the inaugural 'European Nations' Cup' in 1960, with the previous rounds decided in home and away legs.

Some of the great names of world football were missing, including England and Italy, but with a fired-up France and a Soviet Union team at the peak of their powers a superb tournament was assured.

The hosts were missing star forwards Just Fontaine and Raymond Kopa, but had no trouble finding the net, storming into a 4-2 lead in their semi-final with Yugoslavia.

But the Balkan nation mounted a sensational comebacks, netting three times in the last 15 minutes to stun a packed Parc des Princes and reach the final.

'BLACK PANTHER' BACKS UP SOVIET POWER PLAY

Meanwhile, Gavril Kachalin's powerful Soviets out muscled a skilful Czechoslovakia, whose star player Josef Masopust had a tough evening.

With Igor Netto dictating the play, the Soviets were too good, cruising home by three goals to nil.

Faced with legendary goalkeeper Lev Yashin: the 'Black Panther', the Yugoslavs failed to conjure another goal-scoring bonanza in the final .

On a cold and rainy evening in Paris, Yashin pulled off a number of heroic saves as the sides played out a hard-fought encounter.

With the sides still locked at 1-1 after 113 minutes, Soviet striker Viktor Ponedelnik made himself a hero.

Meshki delivered a pinpoint cross and the striker headed emphatically home to seal his country's only major footballing crown.

1964: VIVA ESPAÑA!

The 1964 Nations' Cup in Spain nearly took on a very strange look: Luxembourg created an absolute sensation as they came agonizingly close to making the last four. Join Eurosport.com as we travel back in time for the latest installment of our European Championship history series.

The tiny nation held Denmark to three-all and two-all draws at home and away to set up a play-off in Amsterdam.

Ollie Madsen, who scored all five Danish goals in the first two matches, was on target yet again to overcome the doughty Luxembourgis 1-0.

Luxembourg's Camille Dimmer reflects on his country's greatest footballing achievement with a mixture of pride and melancholy.

"After those three games, I remember I was pretty sad. But those games are now some of the most golden chapters in the history of football in Luxembourg."

"At that moment there was huge national interest for football in Luxembourg certainly."

But it was Denmark who progressed to Spain, where they and the hosts were joined by the defending champions of the USSR, and Hungary.

Although no longer the 'Magnificent Magyars' marshaled by Ferenc Puskas, they were still a formidable proposition for the hosts in their semi-final.

In front of an expectant Madrid crowd, Jus Pereda put Spain in front. But it was not all plain sailing, and Athletic Bilbao's great goalkeeper José Angel Iribar made a rare error, dropping a cross at the feet of Bene, who sent the match to extra time.

Just five minutes before the dreaded coin-toss, Real Madrid's Amancio forced home a winner to send waves of relief coursing around the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Meanwhile, the USSR despatched Hungary 3-0, with 1960 hero Viktor Ponedelnik once more among the scorers.

With the Soviets looking invincible, Spanish coach José Villalonga found an innovative way to make his players believe they could win.

"(Villalonga's) methods were really quite odd," remembers Pereda. "He took us for a walk. And I remember he mapped out a football pitch on a patch of sand. Now what he did: he used stones to represent us, the Spanish players&hellip And then he used pine cones to represent the Russians.

"Well, he convinced us that stones were stronger than pine cones; and that therefore we were going to win"

And win they did. With Luis Suarez conducting the orchestra, the pumped-up Spanish went into a sixth-minute through Pereda, only to be pegged back soon after.

Six minutes remained when Marcelino netted a diving header to send the 80,000-strong crowd into raptures.

Serial underachievers at international level, Spain have not lifted a major honour since, but the memories of glory on home turf will live on in national lore.

1968: LUCKY ITALY

Hosts Italy climbed to the summit of European football taking the 1968 title in circumstances which

must rank their triumph among the most controversial in the competition's history.

Before hostilities amongst the 31 entrants got underway, there were major off-field developments with the tournament taking on its modern-day moniker - the European Football Championship - replacing the original European Nations' Cup.

Reigning world champions England qualified for the semi-final stages for the first time in their history, and with the same squad that overcame Germany 4-2 in the 1966 final, were hotly-tipped to add continental glory to their world crown.

England were drawn against the talented but temperamental Yugoslavs, who had swept aside France 5-1 in the home leg of their quarter-final.

In a bad-tempered game in Florence, Bobby Charlton rose above the foul-strewn mediocrity to twice come close to sending England through to the final.

But the Yugoslavs - who had looked dangerous on the break - delivered the telling blow just four minutes before full-time, Dzajic chesting down Petkovic's cross before smashing the ball past Gordon Banks to send the Balkan side through.

Alan Mullery's red card just a minute from the end merely compounded the world champions' woes.

Italy had a more comfortable - if infinitely more fortuitous - passage to the final, 'defeating' the USSR on the toss of a coin.

And the fates smiled on the host nation once again in the final.

Yugoslavia were leading 1-0 through Dzajic when the Azzurri were awarded a free-kick. With the Balkan side still lining up their defensive wall, Domenghini took the kick quickly, catching the Yugoslavs napping to snatch an equaliser.

The game finished all square.

The Italians made five changes to their line-up for the replay while the Yugoslavs kept faith with the eleven from the first game, the Azzurri finally overcoming their tired opponents 2-0 with goals from Riva and Anastasi.

1972: IT'S MÜLLER TIME!

Holders Italy were not on hand to defend their European title in 1972, surprisingly defeated by Belgium over two legs in the quarter-finals.

In a repeat of the 1966 World Cup final West Germany faced a familiar foe and a painful trip down memory lane: England at Wembley.

This time they came out smiling. A Gunther Netzer-inspired 3-1 away first leg win killed the tie, and Germany were through.

The Belgians' reward for their heroics was to host the finals as the finals moved to the low countries for the first time.

With Lady Luck on a cigarette break, they drew the formidable West Germans in the last four. Despite lacking genuine class Belgium made a good account of themselves, eventually stopped by a

rampant Gerd Müller. A brace from 'Der Bomber' was enough to seal a 2-1 win.

Perennial contenders the USSR took on Hungary in the other semi-final, scraping through, courtesy of a solitary Anatoly Konkov strike, to reach their third final in four tournaments.

'Der Bomber' was in no mood to spare the poor Soviets, netting two more goals as Germany cruised to an impressive, if anticlimactic, three-nil win.

Including qualifying, Müller's goal tally reached an extraordinary eleven, out of his country's fifteen, in just eight matches.

After near misses in the 1966 and 1970 World Cups, captain Franz Beckenbauer finally got his hands on some silverware.

The Belgium finals heralded a golden period of West German football, as they went on to stun Johan Cruyff's wonderful Dutch in the 1974 World Cup, and were right back in contention in 1976.

1976: PANENKA SPOT ON

One image dominates the 1976 Championship, perhaps the most famous the tournament has ever produced. Yet Antonin Panenka's extraordinary dinked penalty to seal Czechoslovakia's victory in the final was just one of many highlights from a thrilling tournament, whose four matches provided 19 goals.

The qualifying tournament saw a rampant Dutch side obliterate Belgium 7-1 on aggregate, Robert Rensenbrink netting a first leg hat-trick in Rotterdam.

The USSR missed out on the finals for the first time as they fell to a highly motivated Czechoslovak side over two legs. The Soviets froze in front of a hostile Bratislava crowd, and failed to overturn the 2-0 deficit on home turf.

The finals, in Yugoslavia, got off to a tempestuous start as three men saw red in Czechoslovakia's semi-final summit with the Netherlands.

BALKAN GOAL RUSH

Czechoslovak captain Anton Ondruš scored at both ends and the game went to extra time.

Playing ten against nine, the extra man finally paid off as goals from Nehoda and Vesely in the last five minutes decided a classic encounter, sending Czechoslovakia into the final.

In the other semi-final Yugoslavia also took the holders West Germany to an extra thirty minutes. Goal machine Gerd Müller dropped two more bombs in the 115th and 119th minutes to wrap up his hat-trick and an extraordinary 4-2 win.

After the Netherlands snatched third place with another extra time win, 3-2 over Yugoslavia, the stage was set for a fittingly exceptional final.

Goals from Dobias and Svehlik appeared to set Czechoslovakia on their way to an easy win, but the Germans, as always, fought back.

Gerd Müller reduced the deficit shortly before the half-hour mark before Hölzenbein struck two

minutes from time to send the game into extra time.

This time there was to be no extra time winner, and the title went down to a penalty shoot-out.

At 4-3 to the Czechoslovaks Uli Hoeness blazed over, and Antonin Panenka stepped up for the most famous penalty of all time.

As Sepp Maier dived to his left, Panenka, under colossal pressure, chipped the ball impudently down the middle, and Czechoslovakia were European Champions.

1980: HORST POWER!

Belgium were the surprise package of the 1980 European Championships, but their in-form side had to bow to the might of Germany who took the title for a second time.

Before hostilities commenced, UEFA gave the tournament a face-lift, doubling the number of countries in the finals, shaping it into an eight-team two-group competition which served as the forerunner of today's full-blown event.

European football's ruling body decided each group winner would advance to the final, with the two runners-up playing off for third place.

In a tough Group A, it was the then-West Germans who took control with a 1-0 win over Czechoslovakia - thus gaining revenge for their 1976 final defeat - before seeing off eternal rivals Holland 3-2 in a thrilling encounter. A 0-0 draw with Greece secured the Germans place in the final for the third successive tournament.

This set up a Czechoslovakia v Holland clash for runners-up spot in the group, with the defending champions squeezing through after the game ended in a 1-1 draw.

England - one of the fancied teams pre-tournament - were paired with Belgium, host nation Italy and Spain in what promised to be a tight group.

After finishing with the best record in qualifying, England were unable to recapture the form which had seen them through to the finals and stuttered to a 1-1 draw with Belgium in their opening game - Jan Cuelemans cancelling out a Ray Wilkins opener.

The Belgians - boosted by their performance against the English - then beat Spain 2-1 before securing their place in the final with a 0-0 draw against Italy.

The final could hardly have started in a worse manner for the Belgians, Horst Hrubesch popping up with a goal after only ten minutes to put the Germans into the driving seat.

But just as time appeared to be running out, the Belgians got themselves back into the game, Rene Vandereycken holding his nerve to bury a 72nd minute penalty.

With both sides holding out, extra-time looked to be on the cards, but Hrubesch dramatically snatched a winner just two minutes from time to break Belgian hearts

1984: OOH-LA-LA

Hosts nation France strode majestically to their European championship, with Michel Platini standing

astride the tournament as its undoubted star.

Take a trip back with Eurosport.com's Time Machine as we see how the French took the title playing stunning attacking football which had the whole continent cooing 'ooh-la-la's of admiration.

Juventus star Platini was at the height of his powers, orchestrating a talented French line-up through the group stages, scoring all his team's goals in the final group game to rescue les Bleus and beat Yugoslavia 3-1 as the hosts went through as Group A winners.

Denmark overcame Belgium - the unlucky finalists of the 1980 edition - to advance to the semi-finals as group runners-up, as UEFA again changed the rules with the top two in each group going into semi-finals.

The talented but temperamental Portuguese awaited the hosts after they finished runners-up to neighbours Spain in Group B.

In one of the Euro's classic encounters, full of fast-flowing football, Domergue put France 1-0 up, a lead they held until deep into the second half when Jordao rose above Michel Hidalgo's defence to head past Joel Bats and take the game into extra-time.

As both sides pushed for the win, it was the Iberians who seized the advantage, Jordao again the executioner, though his badly mis-hit shot was lucky to find the net.

But with time running out, the magical French midfield of Alain Giresse, Jean Tigana and Luis Fernandez, coupled with Platini fashioned a revival.

Tigana caused panic with a surging run deep into Portuguese territory, the chaos allowing Domergue to strike his second of the game and bring France level, before Platini himself proved the ultimate saviour, delivering the hosts with a right-foot drive to win 3-2.

If the France - Portugal was to go down as an eternally glorious page in Euro history, the Spain - Denmark encounter in the other semi was instantly forgettable.

With both sides cancelling each other out - Lerby struck for Denmark with Maceda replying for Spain - the game trundled to an almost inevitable penalty shoot-out - Spain edging through 5-4.

It was the French who took the lead in front of the Parisian crowd, but it was Spain keeper Luis Arconada who they had to thank for a gift of a goal.

France were awarded a fairly dubious free-kick on the edge of the Spanish box. Platini, inevitably, was behind the set-piece and though his shot lacked power, the ball squirmed underneath the prostrate Arconada and trundled over the line to give the French star his ninth goal of the tournament.

1992: DANES CRASH PARTY

Euro 92 provided the biggest shock of this or any other international tournament, as the eventual winners were not even supposed to be there.

Yugoslavia beat the Danes by a single point in qualifying group four, but the Balkan civil war led to the country's expulsion just days before the tournament.

As group runners-up and the second-placed team with the best record, Denmark were an uncontroversial replacement.

The early stages showed little of what shocks were ahead. Having had minimal preparation, Richard Møller-Nielsen's men failed to score in their opening two group one matches - drawing 0-0 with England and going down 1-0 to host nation Sweden.

In the final group games Denmark would have to beat France and pray for an English defeat against Sweden. David Platt's fourth minute goal in Solna appeared to have set England on their way.

LINEKER BOWS OUT

But Jan Eriksson levelled the score and Graham Taylor famously withdrew Gary Lineker as his side searched for a winner. It was a sad end to a sparkling international career; even sadder when Thomas Brodin stuck away a fantastic winner eight minutes from time.

Henrik Larsen got Denmark off to a flier in Malmö with an eighth-minute opener, only for the exceptional Jean-Pierre Papin to restore parity on the hour mark. With time running out Lars Elstrup notched the Danish winner, and it was a Scandinavian party as France and England were unceremoniously dumped out.

The Netherlands and Germany were in confident form in group two, but with the former-Soviet CIS also in contention it fell to lowly Scotland to play a deciding role.

Already eliminated, the Scots pulled out a miraculous performance to thrash the CIS 3-0 thanks to goals from McStay, McClair and McAllister.

DUTCH REASSERT DOMINANCE

Meanwhile the Dutch were continuing their red-hot rivalry with Germany. Victors in 1988, Holland got their comeuppance in the 1990 World Cup, This time the men in orange powered to a 3-1 win to seize cross-border bragging rights.

The last four was a bridge too far for the hosts. Against the star-studded Germans, Sweden went behind to a Thomas Hässler free kick that completely wrong-footed the hapless Thomas Ravelli.

"The game before [Hässler] scored against Russia. He had a good shot to the left of the goalkeeper. I thought he would shoot the same shot against me. He put it over the wall - and I didn't see the ball before it was too late," reflected a rueful Swedish custodian.

Karl-Heinz Riedle made it two just before the hour, and despite a late flurry of goals Berti Vogts's men held on for a 3-2 win.

GERMAN OVERCONFIDENCE

Striker Jürgen Klinsmann came into the side at the injured Rudi Völler's expense, and recounts how both he and the German squad grew in confidence:

"From game to game I had more and more fun. Pass by pass I made progress.

"By the time we got to the semi-final against Sweden I was convinced that we could do it. And before the final we had a lot of self-confidence - maybe too much self-confidence."

The Netherlands, never short of self-confidence themselves, went into their semi-final against

Denmark as huge favourites, but got an equally massive shock in the opening minutes, when Henrik Larsen converted Brian Laudrup's cross for the opening goal.

A young Dennis Bergkamp hit back on 23 minutes, but once again the Danes showed enormous spirit, Larsen once again van Breukelen just after the half hour.

Holland weren't finished. Frank Rijkaard swooping to level as time ran out to take the match into a goalless extra period and penalties.

SCHMEICHEL SAVES DANISH BACON

It came down to Europe's best striker against a man soon to be recognised as the continent's best goalkeeper - van Basten against Schmeichel. The Dane saved to set up a dream final.

Ruud Gullit was certainly impressed by Schmeichel's presence: "A very powerful guy. Charismatic also. You had a feeling that there was somebody there in the goal that makes you already very strong as a team."

The final was not a classic game, but certainly provided a classic result. After twenty minutes of unbroken German onslaught - with Schmeichel once more saving the Danish bacon - the underdogs broke.

The ball fell to the unlikely figure of John Jensen and the normally goal-shy midfielder struck firmly past the unsuspecting Illgner.

Again Schmeichel denied Klinsmann before, with twelve minutes remaining, Kim Vilfort to seal a remarkable 2-0 win.

"A lot of people, after we actually won that trophy, said that we were probably not the best team in the tournament," playmaker Laudrup remembers.

"But I think: Do not underestimate a team like that. Maybe we were not playing the most fantastic football in all the games. But I think if you beat teams like Germany and Holland, obviously you deserve to get the title."

And deserve it they did; a thoroughly remarkable football success

1996: GERMANY HAUNT HOSTS

Euro '96 was meant to be the tournament when England shook themselves out of the 30-year slump they had endured since the 1966 World Cup and again scooped silverware on home soil. It ended in painfully familiar style: defeat to Germany.

After opening draws, England and Scotland locked horns in a famous 'derby' at Wembley, in which David Seaman and Paul Gascoigne were England's heroes.

The former saved a Gary McAllister penalty; the latter scored a remarkable solo effort, capped off with a tabloid-mocking celebration that aped the infamous 'dentist's chair' incident that took place in a Hong Kong nightclub before the tournament.

Things went from good to better for the host nation when they race into a scarcely believable 4-0 lead over the Netherlands. Patrick Kluivert's late reply was more than a consolation: it sent the Dutch

through at Scotland's expense.

Group B saw France and Spain progress at the expense of Romania and Bulgaria's East European flair, while Group C threw up a massive surprise.

SACCHI ITALIANS PAY FOR COMPLACENCY

After beating Russia, Italy boss Arrigo Sacchi rested several key players against the Czech Republic and paid the price.

Goals from Pavel Kuka and Radek Bejbl, and a remarkable last-gasp miss by Pierluigi Casiraghi, handed the Czechs a shock 2-1 win.

A 90th-minute Vladimir Smicer equaliser helped Dusan Uhrin's unfancied side survive a Russian onslaught to salvage a 3-3 draw, and they joined Germany in the quarter-finals. Italy were out, and Sacchi paid with his job.

It was a fantastic achievement for a Czech Republic team playing its first tournament since splitting from Slovakia.

"We certainly had a magnificent group of players who were proud to wear the colours of our National team," reflects playmaker Pavel Nedved.

"That was the key: Pride - in representing our country. It was our performance against Italy that set us on the road towards the final."

DENMARK HIT BY SUKER PUNCH

Holders Denmark came undone in Nottingham, destroyed by the brilliance of Davor Suker who sealed a 3-0 victory with an extraordinary late chip over the bewildered Schmeichel. Croatia joined Portugal in the latter stages.

Croatia's reward was a quarter-final date with the favourites, in which they gave Germany a real fright. It took a vital header from the majestic Matthias Sammer to seal a narrow 2-1 victory.

"All together, I believe we showed in this game that we had the necessary calmness and that we knew that we were physically strong," said Sammer.

"And in the end... of course we won." Of course they won; they were Germany.

Karel Poborsky scored the goal of the tournament, and earned a move to Manchester United, with an astonishing lob for the Czech Republic against Portugal.

The 100-1 outsiders were in the last four, where they played France, conquerors on penalties of a disappointing Dutch outfit.

A dreary 120 minutes, and more spot kicks. Reynald Pedros saw his kick saved, and Kavalec put the Czech Republic, incredibly, into the final.

SPOT-KICK AGONY

Next was the small matter of yet another Anglo-German summit with England spurning classic red for controversial grey shirts. The shirts were the only dull thing about a pulsating game.

Alan Shearer headed the hosts ahead early on, before Stefan Kuntz lived up to his name by dashing

English hopes of a normal-time triumph.

Then to 30 minutes of golden goal tension, and two fantastic opportunities for England to slay their nemesis; Anderton hit the post, Gascoigne's pace deserted him with the goal as his mercy, and it was penalties again.

Five expertly-taken kicks each, and England were running out of set-piece takers. Gareth Southgate stepped nervously up and scuffed into Andreas Köpke's arms. Andy Möller had no such trouble, and English hearts were broken again.

The suspended Matthias Sammer was happy to admit to the luck of the Germans: "We performed very well by achieving a score of 1-1 in normal time and then a goalless draw in extra time. A penalty shootout is always based on luck."

But was it lucky that David Seaman got nowhere near any of the six German kicks? "I have to hold my hands up that the penalties that the Germans took were really, really good penalties," conceded the England stopper.

An anti-climactic final saw the Czechs unable to pull off one final shock. Five minutes into golden goal extra time, Petr Kouba failed to hold Oliver Bierhoff's tame shot and looked on in horror as the ball spun in off the post.

The Queen gritted her teeth and presented Sammer with the trophy, but her mind was elsewhere. "Why on earth didn't Ince take that sixth penalty?" pondered Her Majesty. Two years later she would find out why.

2000: ZIZOU'S GOLDEN TOUCH

A fiercely competitive tournament where standards reached an all-time high; Euro 2000 was international football at its very pinnacle.

Belgium and the Netherlands played host to a fantastic roller-coaster ride of brilliance, drama and tension that kept fans enraptured right up to the final kick.

In the first phase, Group A heralded a changing of the guard as lumbering and technically-deficient England and Germany sides were eliminated by the nimble, clever Portuguese and Romanians.

Twice England threw away leads to lose 3-2, and their laboured 1-0 win over Germany, a match reminiscent of two aging drunks brawling in a car park, was the tournament's low-point.

Italy started their campaign in fine style, cruising through Group B as Francesco Totti came of age as an international player, while Turkey knocked out the despondent co-hosts Belgium.

Spain did things the hard way, as usual, mounting an astonishing comeback against Yugoslavia. A goal down in the 93rd minute, they needed two to stay in the competition, and got them. Mendieta's spot-kick and Alfonso's smartly taken winner sealed a scarcely believable 4-3 win.

Yugoslavia thought they were out until news of Norway's failure filtered through. The stunned Slavs had earned a reprieve.

Group D was a hard-luck story for the Czech Republic, unluckily beaten by the Netherlands, then by a French side inspired by a Zinedine Zidane at the peak of his powers. The two favourites progressed.

DUTCH CRUMBLE UNDER SPOTLIGHT

Italy continued their impressive progress in the last-eight; goals from Filippo Inzaghi and Totti despatched a shell-shocked Romanian side. Dino Zoff's side were looking like potential champions.

They went through to face the Dutch, fresh from a 6-1 demolition of Yugoslavia in an epic semi-final in which the rampant Patrick Kluivert bagged a hat-trick.

In an epic tie, ten-man Italy repelled an almost constant barrage of Dutch pressure, but had to ride their luck; twice the men in Orange had the chance to score from the spot in normal time. First, Frank De Boer's weak kick was easily saved by the excellent Toldo.

"I remember that the first major incident in the match was a penalty taken by De Boer. I tried to anticipate the direction and I saved it very well. After that I remember a sequence of shots at my goal and a ball that obviously never wanted to go in," Toldo remembers.

"I realised it was going to be our lucky day."

Toldo's theory was put to the test when Kluivert stepped up for the second penalty and sent him the wrong way. The ball rebounded back off the post.

The match, inevitably, went to a penalty shootout. Psychologically battered, the Netherlands scored just two out of five and Italy were in the final.

France's path to the final was not without incident, much of it involving kicks from twelve yards. At 2-1 up against Spain Fabien Barthez needlessly hacked Abelardo for a 90th minute penalty. If Raul had been wearing the white of Real Madrid, the net would surely have bulged. He ballooned the kick over.

UNSTOPPABLE FRANCE

In the last four Portugal put up a sterling fight until the 114th minute, when Abel Xavier stopped a David Trezeguet shot with his hand.

Referee Günter Benkö awarded a hotly-dispute penalty and, after three minutes of vigorous Portuguese protests, Zinedine Zidane nervelessly smashed the ball into the top-left corner of Vitor Baia's net. Unstoppable, and so were France.

To the final in Rotterdam where France, looking to become the first World Champions to then win in Europe, appeared to lose their bottle.

Ten minutes after the break Marco Delvecchio gave Dino Zoff's men the lead, and the French bid for an historic double was petering tamely out. Alex Del Piero squandered two gilt-edged chances, but it seemed as though it would not matter.

Then, with the Italian bench poised for a triumphant pitch invasion, Silvain Wiltord's 94th minute shot bobbed through a sea of legs and into the far corner.

Italy were broken, there would be only one winner. Robert Pires turned Fabio Cannavaro and crossed for David Trezeguet to deliver a stunning knockout punch.

"It started with a great move by Robert Pires on the left. Pires dribbled around Cannavaro and got to the byline, then he put in the cross," Trezeguet remembers of his most famous goal.

"It was a fairly difficult cross, but I was on the penalty spot and I hit the ball as it dropped and it went in.

"It all happened so quickly, you don't have much time to think but it was enormously satisfying for all of us."

Trezeguet's thunderbolt of a volley elevated that French vintage to another level of greatness. The World Cup win on home soil had been no fluke.

Perhaps more significantly Euro 2000 proved that, in Zidane, France had a successor to Pele, Cruyff and Maradona: the world's finest player.

2004: OUTSTANDING GREECE

The twelfth edition of UEFA's quadriennial European Football Championship was held in Portugal, for the first time, between June 12 and July 4, 2004.

Like in the previous two editions, in England and Netherlands/Belgium, sixteen teams contested the final tournament after going through a qualification round which began in 2002.

The tournament took place in ten venues located in eight cities — Aveiro, Braga, Coimbra, Guimarães, Faro/Loulé, Leiria, Lisbon and Porto.

During the tournament there were several surprises: the German, Italian and Spanish national football teams all were knocked out during the group stage; the title-holders France were eliminated in the quarterfinals by unfancied Greece, and the Portuguese hosts managed a winning streak towards the final, following their opening defeat, by beating Spain, England and The Netherlands along the way.

For the first time, the final featured the same teams as the opening match, with the hosts losing both of them also for the first time. Portugal was beaten by Greece on both occasions.

Greece's triumph was even more outstanding considering that in their only other appearance, back in 1980, they did not win a single game.

2008 - SPAIN FOR THE SECOND TIME AFTER 44 YEARS

Croatia, Spain and the Netherlands all qualified with maximum points, while Austria and Switzerland were not expected to progress, despite the advantage of being the hosts.

In Group A, the Swiss lost their captain, Alexander Frei, to injury in their first game and became the first team to be eliminated from the tournament, after losing their first two matches.

Austria fared slightly better in Group B, managing to set up a decisive final game against Germany, dubbed "Austria's final".

However, they lost by one goal, making Euro 2008 the first European Championship not to have one of the host nations present in the knockout stage.

In an exciting final game in Group A, an injury- and suspension-hit Turkey came back from 2–0 down to beat the Czech Republic 3–2, after an uncharacteristic handling mistake by Petr Čech, in the last few minutes, left Nihat Kahveci with the simplest of finishes.

In the same game, goalkeeper Volkan Demirel was shown a red card for pushing Czech striker Jan Koller to the ground. The Turks joined Portugal as the qualifiers from Group A.

France were the high-profile victims of Group C, recording just one point from a goalless draw against Romania in their opening game. Italy beat the French, on the final day, to finish on four points and joining the Netherlands in the quarter-finals.

Finally, in Group D, Greece failed to reproduce the form of their shock 2004 win, and ended the tournament with no points. Russia qualified at the expense of Sweden, after beating them in a final game decider, joining Spain in the knockout stage.

In the quarter-finals, the Portuguese team was unable to give their coach, Luiz Felipe Scolari, a fitting send-off – following the mid-tournament announcement that Scolari would be leaving to join English club Chelsea – losing in an exciting game against Germany.

Turkey continued their streak of last-gasp wins, equalising at the end of extra-time against Croatia and advancing on penalties.

Coached by Dutchman Guus Hiddink, Russia eliminated the Netherlands with two extra-time goals. The last quarter-final match saw Spain defeat Italy on penalties, after a goalless draw in regular time.

Turkey's progress was halted by Germany at the semi-final stage. Turkey entered the game with nine of their squad members missing due to injury or suspension, but still scored the first goal. Later, they leveled the score at 2–2, before Germany scored the winning goal in the final minute.

The world television feed of the match was intermittently lost during the match, which prevented the broadcast of Germany's second goal. This was due to a thunderstorm at the broadcasting relay station in Austria, despite the game being played in Switzerland.

Spain won the second semi-final against Russia by three goals to nil, through second-half goals from Xavi, Dani Güiza and David Silva, earning Spain their first appearance in a major final for 24 years.

Spanish football team touring Madrid as champions
In the final, held at Vienna's Ernst-Happel-Stadion, Spain became European champions for the second time after Fernando Torres' first-half goal proved enough to defeat Germany.

Though Germany had a strong start, Spain started to look more dangerous after they had settled. After half an hour, Xavi played a pass in behind the Germany back line towards Torres, who outmuscled a hesitant Philipp Lahm and clipped the ball over the diving Jens Lehmann and just inside the far post.

That goal proved to be the only goal of the game which Spain dominated, despite Germany having

the majority of the possession, and Spain were crowned UEFA Euro 2008 champions.