

# OUTSIDE THE BOX *The Weird, Wonderful—and Sometimes*

By Justin Kavanagh



## A MODERN GREEK ODYSSEY

There were 12 gods in the Pantheon of Ancient Greece. The modern line-up fields only 11. But by now, their image probably adorns every Greek restaurant on Earth. They first shocked the hosts in the opening game, then eliminated the holders France, before reaching the finals at the expense of probably the tournament's finest team, the Czech Republic. And so to the final, which, even now, seems like a strange, surreal dream. European Champions. It sounds like an Hellenic myth. But Greece is the word!

### BECKHAM BRANDED A "LOOSER"

Days after David Beckham's two missed penalties at Euro 2004, vandals defaced a photographic portrait of the England captain at the Royal Academy in London. The vandals also blamed Urs Meier, the Swiss referee who disallowed Sol Campbell's late header against Portugal for England's woes. "Beckham and Meier you losers" (sic) was scrawled in red ink across the portrait by Mark Hom, which was valued at over \$10,000.

It wasn't clear whether the misspelling was a reference to Rebecca Loos, who claimed to have had an affair with Beckham—or just down to plain bone-headed stoopidity!

### THE GAME OF EURO 2004...

Czech Republic 3 Holland 2. One of the greatest contests in the tournament's history. Why... well how long have you got? Just watch the tape.

### SAY WHAT?!

*"The good news is that Saddam faces the death penalty. The bad news is that Beckham's taking it."*

—The best e-mail joke in circulation during Euro 2004.

*"Wayne's the antithesis of Beckham. He'll never wear a sarong out in Liverpool."*

—David Barraclough, designer of Rooney's new "urbanwear" clothes range.

*"I am shocked by the results, bitter and slightly embarrassed, not for me, but for them."*

—Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon claims that the fix was in for the 2-2 draw that put Sweden and Denmark through to the second round and Italy out. He is from the land of Machiavelli, I suppose.



# Sometimes Beautiful—World Game.

*"It was like going out with a girlfriend for five or six years, getting married, and splitting up one week later. You sleep together, wake up, and then see what she looks like first thing in the morning—really quite ugly."*

—Luis Felipe Scolari, Portugal coach, on the joys of spending three weeks together in the confines of the international training camp.

*"Mamma, put the pasta on."*

—Italian fans' banner in Guimaraes, as Italy played Bulgaria, fearing the worst.

*"Rudi, we are the idiots of Europe!"*

—German tabloid newspaper *Bild* spells it out for coach Rudi Voller.

*"This is the last day I speak to you. I've never cared what you write anyway. I'm more of a man than all of you put together."*

—Italy's Christian Vieri comes on all Humphry Bogart—while doing a Greta Garbo.

*"I don't recognize myself from the images that were shown. I give a full public apology and I would like to make it clear that the true Francesco Totti is not the one on the video."*

—If it wasn't you Signor Totti, it was your spitting image!

## THE FINAL BLOW FOR PORTUGAL

After a poor start, Portugal was a nation enthralled with soccer's drama by the day of the final on July 4th. Supporters formed a six-mile long human chain, linking arms along the roads that took the team to the Luz Stadium in Lisbon for the final showdown against Greece. As with their previous trips to the stadium, a flotilla of fishing boats was waiting to greet the team bus as it crossed the Vasco da Gama bridge over the Tagus river bearing the legend "Boldness and Emotion."

Luis Figo and his men could be in no doubt that they carried on their shoulders the weight of destiny. It proved, however, to be a destiny denied.







A dejected Luis Figo can't stand to watch as Eusebio carries the trophy onto the pitch to present to Greece.

## FIGO'S DRAMATIC FAREWELL

When he stormed off down the tunnel after being substituted against England, Luis Figo must have feared that his international career was over. Although later criticized for failing to join his team for the penalty shoot-out, the Portuguese captain responded by giving a semi-final performance against Holland that rolled back the years. Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari's psychological ploy of defending Figo's efforts, while stinging his pride, paid off magnificently.

Alas, the Portuguese legend's past was literally thrown in his face in the final—a pitch invader taunting him with a Barcelona flag. Figo has never been forgiven in Catalonia for joining Real Madrid. Moments later, he swiveled in a crowded penalty box and fired in desperation. Yet again, a Greek defender was there to spoil, and the maestro's final stab at glory rolled inches wide. The last of Portugal's Golden Generation was left with only silver.

## TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT

**Goalkeeper:** Petr Cech (Czech Republic). Confident, consistent. At just 22, could be the Chelsea goalkeeper for years.

**Fullback:** Giourkas Seitaridis (Greece). The right-back's tenacity and concentration left a trail of frustrated top strikers, including Ronaldo, Trezeguet and Raul.

**Fullback:** Ashley Cole (England). His personal duel with Ronaldo was a study in defense. So consistently brilliant at the back, that he could have played for Greece!

**Defender:** Ricardo Carvalho (Portugal). Didn't make Portugal's opening game line-up, but quickly became the lynchpin of the host nation's defense. Flawless reading of the game and distribution.

**Defender:** Traianos Dellas (Greece). Commanding displays throughout were rewarded with the semi-final silver goal against the Czechs.

**Midfielder (and Captain):** Theo Zagorakis (Greece). An outstanding and assured leader, the former Leicester City journeyman was voted UEFA's Player of the Tournament. Martin O'Neill sure spots things the rest of us don't.

**Midfielder:** Pavel Nedved (Czech Republic). The European Player of the Year's creativity and relentless running drove a great team to the brink of glory, until he limped off against Greece.

**Midfielder:** Maniche (Portugal). Outside the Box's Player of Euro 2004 and scorer of the goal of the tournament (vs. Holland in the semifinal). He was everywhere he should have been—except on the winner's podium.

**Midfielder:** Cristiano Ronaldo (Portugal). It ended in tears, but what a joy to watch! One of the few players at Euro 2004 to send expectation pulsing through the crowd every time he got the ball. The Golden Generation is gone now, but Portuguese football has a future.

**Forward:** Milan Baros (Czech Republic). You can't argue with 5 goals.

**Forward:** Wayne Rooney (England). The revelation of the show. Rooney has skill, strength, and nerve. Now... can it last?

**Substitute:** Zinedine Zidane (France). 1-0 down with a minute to go? Send on genius.

**Coach:** Karel Bruckner (Czech Republic). The coach whose team always attacked, "The Magus" made several inspired decisions throughout the finals, including his "second team's" victory over Germany.





### ZIDANE'S STOMACH FOR GREATNESS

Ernest Hemingway defined courage as grace under pressure. Zinedine Zidane was courage and greatness personified in the first round win against England. Trailing 1-0 as injury time approached, France had been frustrated all night by a staunch English rearguard. But when Zidane stepped up to hit an unstoppable last-minute free-kick, his composure seemed unaffected by the occasion.

Two minutes later, we watched in awe as he kept his eye on goalkeeper David James' dive before bringing his foot around the ball to send his penalty in the opposite corner. How could his hips point one way and the ball go the other? How could this shy, humble man possess the steely nerve of an assassin?

His mental strength was all the more awe-inspiring when English television revealed images of Zidane vomiting on the pitch moments before rescuing the game for France.

### DISCOVERY OF EURO 2004...

was England's Wayne Rooney, who set the record for the youngest player to score at the tournament with two goals against Switzerland. That record lasted only a few days before being trumped by Switzerland's own wunderkind, Johann Vonlanthen (100 days younger than Rooney), who netted against France. But Rooney returned home a hero in serious demand after scoring two more against Croatia. His physical strength and responsibility on the ball amazed seasoned soccer-watchers. There were ill-advised comparisons to the young Paul Gascoigne and even to Pelé (by Sven-Goran Eriksson).

But the wisest observation came from former Leeds great, John Giles: "He played football on the streets of Croxteth (a rough Liverpool neighborhood). He learned to compete there. He didn't go to finishing school. Obviously he is a marvelous footballer with every chance of becoming huge in the world game. The question is... will we let him?"



Rooney scores the second goal for England against Croatia.