

## Late lapse leaves England singing same old song

*Press holds its fire as Beckham and friends make their excuses for farcical defeat*

Once again England fans watched in disbelief as their side snatched defeat from the jaws of victory with barely a minute left to play. Yesterday the players tried to put a brave face on the farcical defeat when, having dominated France for 90 minutes, they contrived to concede two goals in injury time.

Michael Owen, who was substituted 55 minutes into the game after making little impression on the match, told the BBC: "I would prefer to lose the first game of a tournament like this rather than any other, although it is a bitter blow for us.

"It was a bit of a mugging and hard to take, but we move on to our next games knowing we did ourselves proud apart from two minutes in injury time."

The Liverpool striker had no explanation for what went wrong and how Zinedine Zidane, who had an otherwise uneventful and unimpressive game, managed to score twice.

"It is such a disappointment after we played so well and looked so solid for so long," he said. "When

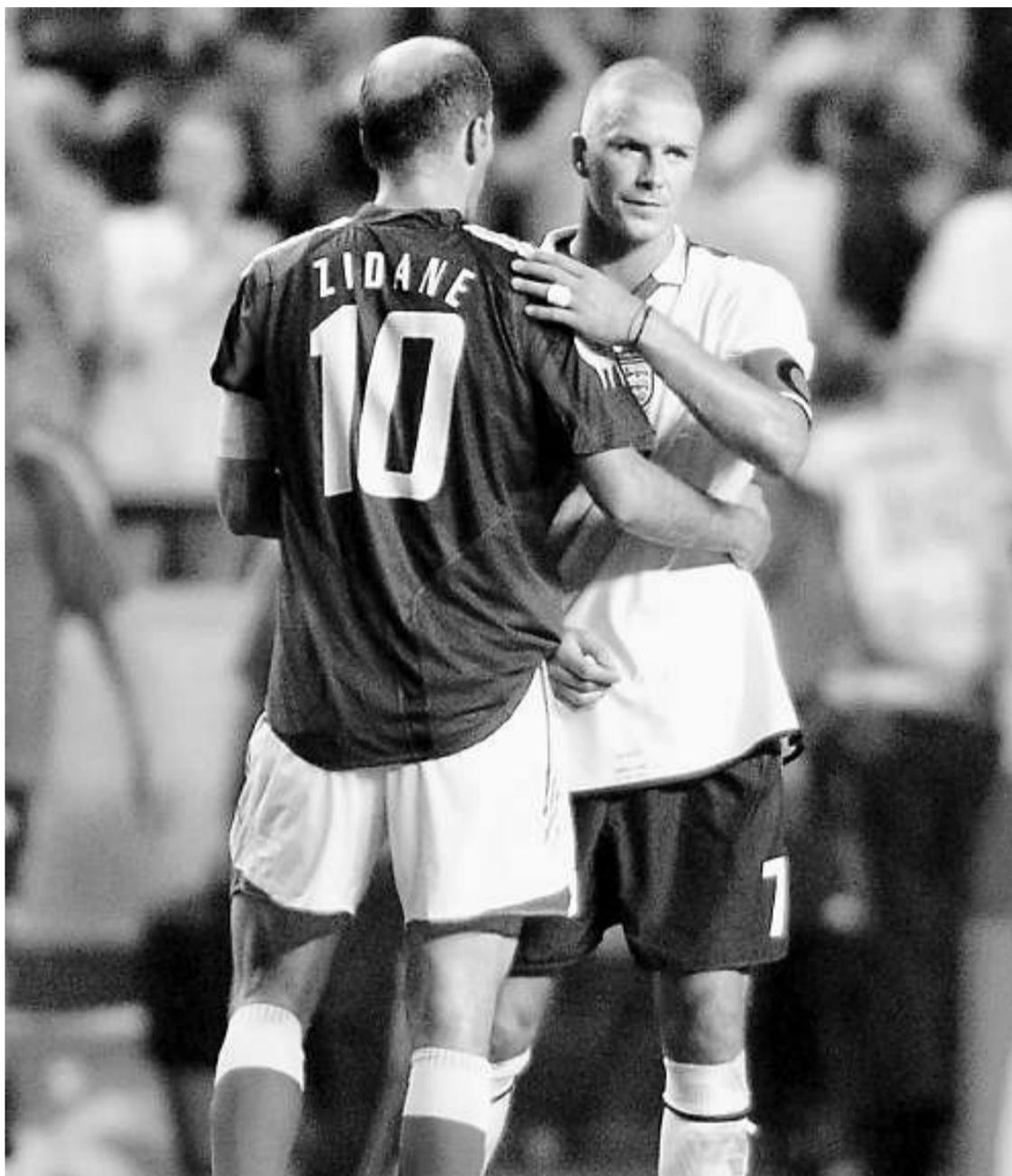
you get into injury time and you are winning, the worst thing you think you can do is draw, so to lose is a real sickener.

"But Zidane's free kick was fantastic and the back-pass that led to the penalty was just one of those things for Steven Gerrard that can happen to anyone."

For the the British press it was time to drag out the "gutted" headlines. "I'm to blame. My penalty miss cost us a win" *The Sun* had David Beckham saying. "Becks in tears as England's glory bid falters" according to *the Mirror*. The more sedate *Guardian* said: "Zidane beats the clock and puts England in deep shock" while *The Daily Telegraph* echoed that with: "England shattered by Zidane."

Frank Lampard, who scored England's goal, said that France's enthusiastic celebrations "might come back to haunt them".

"They were singing French songs of victory but I think it was a bit premature for that and it is not nice to hear, especially when we thought we had won the game."



David Beckham and his Real Madrid team-mate Zinedine Zidane, whose goals snatched victory for France in injury time / EFE



Adisconsolate Raúl is substituted during Spain's opening game. / EFE

## Fans vote for Torres as they seek new saviour for life after Raúl

All washed up at 26? Certainly not, but Raúl, for many years the leader and saviour of Spain and the highest scorer in the national side's history, may not be up to the job any more.

According to a survey published yesterday in the Madrid football daily *Marca*, Raúl should start on the bench. The poll of 15,000 fans showed a majority in favour of Atlético Madrid's Fernando Torres over Raúl as the striking partner for Fernando Morientes. An overwhelming majority voted for Joaquín of Betis to replace Josefa Etxeberria on the right wing, despite the latter's solid performance in the opening game against Russia. There was no dispute, however, about retaining the excellent Vicente on the left.

Although Spain beat Russia 1-0, it was not a convincing victory and the play was sloppy, with many pas-

ses going astray. Iñaki Sáez, the coach, is expected to adjust his starting line-up for the match against Greece. Real Sociedad's Xabi Alonso is likely to be favoured over Rubén Baraja in midfield and Juan Carlos Valerón, who scored the vital goal, may again come on as substitute, his preferred role under Sáez.

"I know the best way to play Valerón," Sáez told a press conference. "It's a switch I have made many times and it always works, like it did on Saturday. Just look at the statistics."

The fans may be disenchanted with Raúl but he is almost certain to start, even if the preferred Raúl-Morientes axis turns out not to be working so well since the pair, inseparable at Real Madrid before the arrival of Ronaldo, have ceased playing together at club level.

Not only is Raúl the captain but

Sáez regards him as essential, both as a player and a leader. However, he has just finished his worst season at Real Madrid and in this competition there is little scope for experiment or error. As Sáez said: "You have to bear in mind that this is not the league, but a brief tournament in which you have to go for it 100 per cent in every match."

Sáez said he was glad there was a debate, but that the decision rested with him: "For some Valerón should be in the starting line-up, others prefer to see him used less. But you have to trust me because when Iñaki Sáez says something he says it for a reason."

"Trust me, don't call me stubborn; I do what I do because I think it's right. The coach's job is to get the best out of his players and to make sure that everyone knows what he wants".