

# Van Gaal breaks silence to reflect on ups and downs at Barcelona

*Former Barça coach predicts that Spain will beat France in final of Euro 2004*

"The first time fantastic; the second time disastrous." For the last year and a half since leaving Barcelona, Louis van Gaal has kept silent from his refuge as technical director at Ajax. These days he is commentating at Euro 2004 and took time out to talk to *E19*.

Not surprisingly, Van Gaal has bad memories of his second time as Barcelona manager, blaming his problems on lack of control when it came to signing players: "They wouldn't let me sign the players I wanted. They imposed a player on me that I didn't want and who upset the balance of the team," he said.

No prizes for guessing that he is talking about Juan Román Riquelme. During his second term at the club, the conflict between the two was never out of the news: "The press made a lot of the conflict and so it was difficult for both of us to work," he said.

Another of Van Gaal's players is now involved in a similar conflict,

**Ronaldinho is great but to be football stars they have to lead their teams to trophies**

but Van Gaal points out that Patrick Kluivert's problems only began after he himself had left: "He needs a hard manager," he said, "I leave Barcelona and things start getting difficult for him."

Kluivert is just one of many Dutch players that have left in a process of de-hollandisation at the club that Van Gaal sees as natural. Still, he insists that a complete purge of Dutch players was not a good idea: "To keep the balance in the changing room, it would have been better if one had stayed," he said, adding, "Cocu would have been ideal."

One Dutchman he is willing to praise is Frank Rijkaard, highlighting his ability to find the right balance on the field in the way he has used Ronaldinho: "Ronaldinho plays like Rivaldo in my time, with freedom." He goes on to add, "In fact, it's the system that I imposed with Xavi playing in front of Cocu."

Van Gaal is full of praise for Ronaldinho although he admits to feeling dubious when he first heard about the signing: "At first I thought it was a risk, but since he arrived at Barcelona he has scored goals and made his mark."

Nevertheless, he is reluctant to join in the chorus hailing Ronaldin-



Van Gaal says his hands were tied when it came to signing players and that is when things got out of control/LLUIS CRUSET

ho as the best in the world, at least not until he wins something: "To be football stars they have to lead their teams to trophies," he said.

Talking of trophies, Van Gaal doesn't hesitate in predicting victory for Spain in Euro 2004: "Spain

will win. For me, La Liga has the highest level with the most attractive, attacking football."

Van Gaal has his own theory for why Spain often fall at the last hurdle in these tournaments: "The players don't last long away from home. Be-

ing far from their families is not easy for Spanish people."

So if Spain are to reach the final and win Euro 2004, who does he think they will have to defeat? I think the best final would be Spain vs France. That's my prediction."

## FOOTBALL

**Liverpool to unveil new manager**  
Liverpool Football Club are set to unveil Rafael Benitez as their new manager within days. The 44 year old is favourite to take replace the former manager, Gerard Houllier, who was sacked by the club last month. It is believed that talks between the ex Valencia boss and the club are near completion after Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry returned from his holiday to help seal the appointment of Benitez, who is still serving a notice period after walking out on Valencia at the start of June. The Spanish club have already appointed former Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri as their manager.

## Euro2004

### English fans slammed in jail

Twenty England fans were thrown in jail after fighting on the Algarve in Portugal. Police with riot dogs clashed with about 400 supporters in Albufeira, who were throwing bottles and missiles. Officials have said the ugly scenes was the result of drunken behaviour rather than organised violence. It could land England in trouble with UEFA who issued a pre-tournament warning that England could be sent home if fans were violent.

## EXPULSION

### Russian captain sent home

Alexander Mostovoi, the skipper of the Russian team in the Euro2004 Championship has been expelled from the team after blaming the team manager, Georgi Yartsev for their defeat against Spain. "We were tired by the physical training methods which the manager made us do."

## ENGLAND

### Butt to miss tournament

England player Nicky Butt looks set to miss the rest of the Euro2004 Championships after he suffered knee ligament damage during a training session with the team. Experts say that this type of injury takes three to four weeks to heal. UEFA has so far refused to let the team replace him with a substitute as the circumstances are not "exceptional".

## CYCLING

### Armstrong demands apology

Lance Armstrong, winner of the Tour de France five times is demanding an apology from two journalists who accused him of doping offences in a book *LA Confidential*, the *Secrets of Lance Armstrong*. The reporters base their reports from a former worker from the US Postal team, Emma O'Reilly who was with the team for three years and alleges the cyclists took dope in 1999.

## TENNIS

### Agassi to miss Wimbledon

Andre Agassi will miss Wimbledon tennis tournament through injury.