

Crispin Thomas

“Seeking Henry Delaunay” is without doubt a unique offering. What chance of enthralling readers waxing lyrical on each and every match in an equally engaging tournament... but here it is... thrills, spills, warts and all.. and it works!

Just like the Olympics and the World Cup, the European Championships were set in motion thanks to a Frenchman. The brainchild of the French Federation’s Henri Delaunay, it was to be more than 30 years before the actual tournament was launched. It was natural that the silverware would be named in honour of the first General Secretary of UEFA, who died 5 years before he witnessed his dream come to fruition.

The summer tournament showcases the best Europe has to offer, and we have been treated to some wonderful archived moments. The Spanish political protest, Platini’s goal spree in 84. Gullit, Van Basten, Koeman and the Dutch masters of 88. Ray Houghton’s historic header against the English, Bierhoff’s golden goal and Panenka’s cheeky chip.

The 13th European Championships lived up to star billing with the beauty of Spain eventually overcoming all obstacles to lift the trophy. Head coach Luis Aragones’ men were a joy to behold and their intricate style of play, coupled with devastating and cutthroat finishing taught the rest of the world a footballing lesson. Removing the monkey off their back. Spain have at long last achieved that which they have been threatening to do so for decades. Catapulted up the FIFA rankings, many now see the Spanish as dark horses for the big one in South Africa next year.

The 2008 tournament was a poignant and memorable one. Yet again the Dutch no show proved to be one of the greatest

disappointments, serving up one of the greatest anti climaxes. Of particular enjoyment for the neutrals was the Turkish fighting spirit and never say die attitude. This along with Guus Hiddinks Russia, led by the wizard Arshavin were particularly memorable highlights. Germany as usual were a model of teutonic efficiency, with Lahm's attacking forays, Podolski's goals and Ballack's long range bullet being key features during their run.

They say that there are no easy games anymore, but in essence this is a much harder tournament to win than the World Cup as you rarely get any weak nations to bolster goal differences. France cemented their total post 1998 domination and iced their 8-year superiority by lifting the trophy in 2004.

The tournament will go from strength to strength and I believe it won't be long before the number of participants are increased again.

The author Emdad Rahman is a prolific writer who has developed a natural flair for football poetry and is a much-read and regular contributor to THE FOOTBALL POETS – www.footballpoets.org – now regarded as the largest football poetry website in the world.

I have enjoyed reading and re-visiting the book. It cleverly mixes attention to detail with passion, emotion and the sea-like fluctuations of the Beautiful Game on a European Summer backdrop. Camus once wrote... "everything I know – I owe to football" ... I know the feeling!

May Emdad's crafted lines inspire others to pick up a pen or keyboard and explore the beauty of words, football and sport in general.

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Adnan Ahmed

It is the dream of every schoolboy footballer to represent their country at the highest levels of international duty, and as a football boot clad young whippersnapper, I was certainly no different

As a youngster I would spend hours on the streets of Burnley, playing and dreaming and imitating my footballing heroes. After all, they were the crème de la crème, individuals who could do no wrong, both on and off the pitch.

The spectacle seems to have been around for ever, and my first initial recollections of the European Championship are the 1988 tournament where the Dutch obliterated all in their path. I was only four years old, so too young to be aware of much else of what happened in the Germany tournament. All I remember was the name Marco Van Basten, and in later years I spent hours of my life trying to recreate that famous championship sealing volley against the USSR.

By 1992 I was older and much wiser, and though personally I felt the tournament was dour, I witnessed the astonishing Danish run to the crown. The biggest disappointment had been England being knocked out by what effectively was a Tomas Brodin moment of magic. On another note I can vividly remember Basile Boli's hatchet job on England hardman Stuart Pearce. Staying with the French, they provided the greatest disappointment with Jean Pierre Papin's great disappearing act.

1996 was golden as we hosted the tournament for the first time on these shores. The last time England had hosted a tournament, they had run out winners. 40 years had passed since the greatest moment in English history and the omens were all good – England would lift the trophy.

France and Zidane were simply irresistible and unstoppable in 2000, whilst there very well may never be a bigger upset caused than by the Greek win in 2004. I haven't enjoyed a tournament like I did the 2008 tournament. It was breathtaking, with so many players of such finesse and technical ability. Naturally, it was disappointing that England weren't there and I believe the rest of Europe shared that feeling too.

As an international, I can safely say that international representation and recognition is the peak of any footballer's career. Nothing can beat the feeling of pulling on your nation's colours, standing to attention during the national anthem and playing for your country's footballing honour. The chosen few are envied, cheered and castigated with equal measure

I have very much enjoyed reading Emdad Rahman's prose and footballing verse and would thoroughly recommend the book to anyone, be they a football fan or otherwise.

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Ferencváros