

European Football Championship 2008: Coming a cropper

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With the announcement of the first Euro 2008 squads, the Castrol Performance Index has experienced its first casualty...

“You have to be positive and not be nervous about making changes or bringing through players.” So said Portugal boss Luis Felipe Scolari, a man known for his ruthless streak. And with Portugal enduring their worst slump since 2002 – they failed to beat any of their three closest rivals in qualifying – Maniche became the first high-profile omission ahead of Euro 2008.

Facts and stats

The 30-year-old midfielder, who'd played in eight qualifying matches and was expected to partner Miguel Veloso in a defensive midfield partnership, was Portugal's highest-scoring midfielder in the CPI – possibly because he appeared in all of the last seven qualifiers from which the scores were calculated. He also scored against Poland, albeit with a tap-in following a spill by Poland stopper Artur Boruc.

But key to his absence could be that he rarely plays a full 90 minutes – either domestically or for the Seleção das Quinas. On the eight occasions he played for Portugal he made the starting XI seven times, but was substituted in three of those games. (Moreover Portugal lost one and drew three of those eight.) Similarly, at Internazionale, the club he joined on loan from Atlético Madrid in the winter, he started just 11 games and was taken off in five.

Looking ahead

Petit (300 CPI points) will now partner Veloso behind the attacking midfielders, while 25-year-old Raúl Meireles of Porto, included at Maniche's expense, provides cover. But Valencia defender Marco Caneira, who registered 300 CPI points after keeping two clean sheets (against Finland and Armenia), misses out for the second consecutive European Championship finals as Scolari sticks with 11 of the players from Portugal's Euro 2004 squad. Caneira does tend to give away free-kicks in crucial areas and this season the Valencia defence conceded 61 goals; ironically Scolari has opted for Maniche's brother, Jorge Ribeiro of Boavista, in his place. Uncapped goalkeeper Rui Patrício completes the squad.

Out with the old

Turkey coach Fatih Terim has left out veteran forward Hakan Şükür – the lone striker in eight of Turkey's qualifiers, scoring six goals – from his provisional, 26-man Euro 2008 squad. The 36-year-old has lost his place to the fleetfooted, Villarreal forward, Kahveci Nihat: 'El Turko' has 14 goals in 53 games, and amassed 938 CPI points with two, high-quality goals in the last two qualifiers, most notably a 25-yard volley against Norway that found the bottom, right-hand corner of the net.

Oranje-boom!

Marco van Basten is yet to select his squad, but he'll have to make do without AC Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf, who has asked to be withdrawn.

"It is a decision that comes after serious consideration and months of reflection," he said. "Since my return to the national team, the right conditions have not been created to let me perform at my best and to effectively excel as the team member I always strive to be."

For more news on the European Football Championship 2008 please visit www.castrolindex.com

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