

UEFA

EURO 2020

**FINLAND AND NORTH MACEDONIA ENTER
EUROPEAN WATERS THIS SUMMER
CAN THEY UPSET THE BIG BOYS?**

Predictions | Rookie preview | Interviews with players and managers | Opposition analysis



One last bid for glory

BY: LAURYNAS PUIKYS

24 teams, 12 cities, two rookies and one heated VAR debut – Euro 2020 was going to be a tournament like no other before.

When in 2012 UEFA President Michel Platini announced that the 2020 edition of the European Championship would take place across 12 cities in Europe to commemorate the 60th birthday of the tournament, we were preparing for something unique.

The traveling carnival of

one of the biggest sporting events in the world was about to grip 12 different nations at once for the first time in history.

However, 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic had other plans.

After nearly all the sporting events were postponed across the globe at the start of last year, the Euros were not an exception.

The idea of having a tournament across 12 different countries, with travelling restrictions still in place in the summer, was never

going to work for UEFA in 2020 and they had to postpone the celebration until this year.

However, even with the pandemic still going on, the Euros are going to visit 11 different countries this year.

Only the situation in Ireland has forced the organisers to make changes to the tournament schedule.

Due to coronavirus fears and lack of guarantees regarding spectators in Dublin, four matches that were supposed to happen in Ireland were moved to Saint

Petersburg in Russia.

The city of Bilbao in Spain will also not going to feel the Euro fever – similarly, four fixtures were moved across Spain to Seville.

Other than that, 11 countries had to wait but will get their chance to welcome some of the biggest footballing names on the planet.

Countries include England, Scotland, Italy, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, Hungary, Russia and Azerbaijan.

Even after one year postponement, the Euros are still going to be a package full of surprises.

Portugal's victory, England's cold nightmare and an early exit for the defending champions Spain in the last edition once again demonstrated the unpredictability of the tournament.

This time teams will be eager to perform even better since the pandemic stole their opportunity last year.

Without any doubt, the nation to beat will not be the defending champions Portugal, but a team that has won the last major tournament, France.

Since their World Cup victory in 2018, Didier Deschamps' men were cruising on the same level – beating opponents ruthlessly with only two losses to Turkey and the Netherlands in competitive matches.

21 years since their last European Championship trophy, France will be ready to unleash their potential this summer with the likes of Kylian Mbappe, Antoine Griezmann, Kingsley Coman and good old Olivier Giroud up front.

However, with the recent history of major tournaments' champions getting knocked out in the group stage, France will have to be concentrated from the start.

Especially after Les Bleus were drawn into Group F alongside Portugal, Germany and Hungary.

In a group with the last

three major tournaments' champions, blood will run free.

An exit in the group stage for two major tournaments in a row would not be the way Germany are looking to send off their long serving manager Joachim Low.

The World Cup winner will make sure his swan song is not a brief one as he will coach Germany for the last time this summer.

Portugal will be also keen to demonstrate their emerging talents and defend their title in what could be a swan song at the Euros for Cristiano Ronaldo.

Portuguese forward will be 39 in 2024 and this is likely his last chance to win silverware in the continent.

Recovering and playing a decent tournament will be also the goals for two finalists of the 2012 edition Spain and Italy.

While the luck has not been on their side recently, fresh groups of talent have shined for both and have already demonstrated their potential.

Italy were one of the two teams that won every single game in Euro Qualifiers.

Possession-hungry Roberto Mancini's army will be ready to showcase their talents with Jorginho, Marco Verratti and last year's European Golden Boot winner Ciro Immobile.

The second team with a clean record in the qualifiers was Belgium.

The semi-finalists of the 2018 World Cup are yet to prove their worth at the Euros, but the likes of Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Eden Hazard will be ready to pounce this summer.

Finally, the Netherlands. Despite missing out on the last two major tournaments, they have to be among the favourites to do well.

With Virgil van Dijk, Frenkie De Jong and Memphis Depay, the Netherlands can be aiming for the top spots not only in their group but in the tournament as well.

However, out of all the



Will it be the last Euros for Portugal hero Cristiano Ronaldo? Photo: RexFeatures

teams that are listed above, some are going to fail.

That is the despair and beauty of such tournaments. There will not be room for every team in the knockout stages, especially when competition this year is as even as ever.

We also cannot sleep on such teams as Switzerland, Croatia, Ukraine or Poland.

For the last few years, this quartet was providing some of its best football in recent times and it would not be a surprise to see any of the teams to have a long Euro 2020.

Especially when we have strong examples from the previous years – Wales and Iceland in 2016, Russia and Turkey in 2008 and, of course, Greece's miracle in 2004 when they lifted the Henri Delaunay trophy.

And, surely, do not underestimate the rookies once again.

Finland and North Macedonia have already demonstrated that they will not be an easy bite for teams in their respective groups.

Finland has finished second in their Euro Qualifiers group and enjoyed victories over World Cup winners France, Sweden, Hungary and Ireland in recent years.

North Macedonians have not been quiet on the Western front too.

Igor Angelovski's men qualified for the Euros through the Nations League Path D, but they have also defeated strong names recently.

Not only they have enjoyed victories over their rivals from the Balkan region Kosovo and Slovenia, this March Macedonians beat Germany 2-1 in a friendly match in what could be a sign of things to come this summer.

All in all, the Euros are once again shaping up to be unpredictable and full of surprises.

Possibly, Ronaldo's last dance on the European stage, France's attempt to live up to the favourites' status and stop the European drought, two exciting rookies and another 20 teams that will have a shot at climbing the top of the pedestal.

When it comes to the Euros, anything is possible.

'Belgium will win'

By: LAURYNAS PUIKYS

The Euros are hard to predict every year. Who could have seen Portugal lifting the trophy in 2016? Or Iceland knocking England in such a swift fashion?

With bookmakers and football experts shooting in the dark before the upcoming tournament, Telegraph's own Uche Amako is quite certain about the winner this year.

"I think Belgium will win. They probably have the best collection of midfielders and attackers. Only Germany come close in those areas," Amako said.

Telegraph's sports writer also singled out other potential candidates with no significant surprises - England, Spain, France and Portugal.

A victory for England, unlike most nations mentioned above, would be the first in history. The Three Lions have never played in the final and only came third in 1968 and 1996 tournaments.

Belgium, of course, have never won it either, but Amako suggests that

Roberto Martinez's men could have an easy start in the group phase if Romelu Lukaku brings his scoring boots.

"I think Lukaku can score the most goals. Top scorer usually gets decided in the group stages and the Belgians have no one to fear in theirs," Amako said.

In terms of dark horses, Amako brought up two familiar names that not necessarily belong to this category.

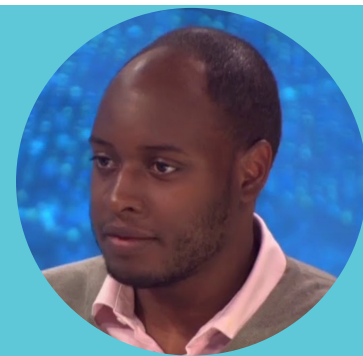
"It sounds strange to call them dark horses but Germany and Italy are the ones to keep an eye on.

"Germany have Serge Gnabry, Leroy Sane, Kai Havertz, Timo Werner, Ilkay Gundogan, Joshua Kimmich and Toni Kroos to call on. They are all world class and would start for any club or country in the world.

"Italians have gone under the radar but also have some excellent players, especially Federico Chiesa," Amako said.

Italy was one of the most successful teams in Euro Qualifiers, winning all 10 matches, scoring 37 and

Telegraph sports writer, **Uche Amako**, shares his views on the upcoming Euros and rates everybody's chances



conceding only four goals.

However, the striker question is still up in the air for Roberto Mancini.

While Ciro Immobile is still trying to fire his engine up for the national team with only three goals in the last three years, Andrea Belotti will be awaiting his chance off the bench.

Speaking about scoring, Amako suggests that newcomers Finland could have a lot to offer up front, especially with Norwich's leader Teemu Pukki:

"I expect Finland to do their best because they have that precious commodity - goals. Teemu Pukki knows where the back of the net is."

Romelu Lukaku was Belgium's top scorer in Euro Qualifiers with seven goals.
Photo: RexFeatures



In terms of which group excites him the most, Amako is certain - Portugal, Germany and France will put on a show:

"Without question, Group F. A real group of death. Each match will be must watch."

EURO2020 QUALIFIED TEAMS

GROUP A
Turkey
Italy
Wales
Switzerland

GROUP B
Denmark
Finland
Belgium
Russia

GROUP C
Netherlands
Ukraine
Austria
North Macedonia

GROUP D
England
Croatia
Scotland
Czech Republic

GROUP E
Spain
Sweden
Poland
Slovakia

GROUP F
Hungary
Portugal
France
Germany

11 JUNE - 11 JULY

Finland: Togetherness is key

BY: LAURYNAS PUIKYS

Performances from Iceland and Sweden in the last two major tournaments have demonstrated that Northern Europeans know their football well.

Iceland have famously knocked out England in Euro 2016 to reach quarter-finals and Sweden did the same to Switzerland in the 2018 World Cup.

Now the time has come for their Nordic brothers to demonstrate their ability.

“We have many strengths. Our togetherness, defensive organisation, tactical flexibility, good mix of youth and experience and continuity among our staff members. There are many things that make us a good team right now.

“But we’re not satisfied, we’re still looking to improve and I think that’s the correct mentality to have. Because if you stand still there is a risk other nations will overtake you,” Finland captain Tim Sparv said.

Having qualified for the first Euros in history after a strong performance in Euro Qualifiers, Finland are hungry for more.

Former stars in Jari Litmanen, Sami Hyypia or Jussi Jaaskelainen have failed to guide Finland to a major tournament, but this time defensive solidity and a breakout leader have proven to be the main factors in reaching the Euros.

Finland only conceded 10 goals in their qualifying campaign and had six clean sheets in 10 matches with Bayer Leverkusen goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky providing one solid performance after another.

Compact defensive positioning was also a factor. With no big names at the back, Finland were one of the best sides defensively in Euro Qualifiers, despite playing in a tough group alongside Italy, Greece and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Manager Markku Kanerva, who was once a Maths and PE teacher in one of Finland’s Primary Schools, with his frankly traditional



Norwich’s Teemu Pukki has scored 10 of Finland’s 16 goals in Euro Qualifiers.

Photo: RexFeatures

system and a 4-4-2 formation has achieved what every manager before him has failed to do.

“The importance of the head coach has been enormous. He has been working for the Finnish FA for years. He has coached youth national teams, coaches, developed coach education and so on.

“Kanerva is a very hard-working and humble person who has evolved into a top coach outside of the spotlight,” said Teemu Eskola, a coach for Finland’s U16 team.

Finland were not the most exciting side to watch in Euro Qualifiers, but Kanerva has done what was needed to do.

His team was tough on defence and have not conceded a goal at home in Euro Qualifiers except the loss against Italy 2-1, where only a 79th minute penalty from Jorginho gifted three points to the Azzurri.

However, at the Euros it will be a different story – due to coronavirus restrictions Finnish fans may not be there to watch their team’s debut.

“We would love to have supporters at our games because it’s not the same atmosphere without them.

“We all miss them, they make our sport come alive and hopefully players and fans can be together soon again. I don’t think anyone will get used to playing in empty stadiums. It becomes a bit boring after a while,” Sparv said.

However, the pandemic and the postponement of the Euros also had its own benefits, says Sparv:

“I think everyone’s initial reaction was disappointment. But of course, it was the right decision to make and quite soon we looked at it through a more positive lens.

“Another year to prepare, another year to get ourselves ready for our biggest test yet. And this additional year has actually been really good so far so who knows. Maybe it was a blessing in disguise.”

Finland has demonstrated that their form over the additional year, if not got better, then stayed as sharp as it was before.

In the Nations League,

Finland were close to a second promotion in a row in Group B4 and only lost out to Wales by four points, leaving Ireland and Bulgaria comfortably behind.

Perhaps the most famous win came in a friendly match when Kanerva’s men beat France 2-0 away from home.

Didier Deschamps was playing a strong French side that evening, but Finland managed to win even without their main man.

Norwich’s own Teemu Pukki was the man who fired up Finland up front in Euro Qualifiers, scoring 10 out of 16 Finland’s goals.

“Teemu is a key player to us. It will be very important for us that he continues the form he has had in the national team as well as at club level for a long time now,” said Djurgadens midfielder Rasmus Schuller.

For Finland, collective performance and working as a unit is important, but if we have to pick out the most dangerous man, it has to be Pukki.

The Finnish striker has been firing up the Championship once more this year,

with Norwich comfortably sitting in first. Pukki scored 26 goals in 41 matches for the Canaries and Finland fans can only hope he brings his shooting boots this summer.

However, opposition will be experienced and well prepared. Belgium, Denmark and Russia have 17 Euros appearances between them and Finland will face a steep hill in an attempt to qualify for the next stage.

“It’s a very difficult group and it will take three near perfect performances from us, and a little bit of luck, to get through to the next round.

“This team has shown, for a number of years now, that we can do things that people don’t expect. We’re full of confidence but well aware that it will be tough to qualify,” Sparv said.

Schuller agrees: “The teams we are facing have more experience, but we are going to the Euros with a mentality that we can win every game.

“We can work from an underdog position and that has worked well for us in the past.”

View from the stands

Rich Nelson, *The Finnish Football Show*

I expect Finland to be well organised, strong and certainly give Russia and Denmark a good game. Their record against elite opponents is poor, but the spine of the team is consistent and they'll be inspired by just being there.

A good result would be reaching the Last 16, a great achievement. Winning a group game would be a step in achieving that and I think three or four points is not unrealistic.

Our most underrated player is Glen Kamara. A year ago I'd have said Kamara but he has become fairly high profile, he was always steady and consistent but is now looking more dangerous going forward. His partnership with Sparv in midfield brings out the best in both.

Our leader is Tim Sparv. He is the captain and leader, although his form has dipped in the last year and

has had a lot of injuries. Hradecky is also an outstanding individual and always organises the defence well.

Opponents should fear for Teemu Pukki. He has become such a dangerous goalscorer in the last two years - he always got in great positions but has now added a clinical edge and is by far the biggest threat.

It will all depend on injuries and fitness. They will be the biggest factors - the spine is so settled and while the supporting players know their roles, the coach will often change to a 5-3-2 to accommodate changes which can disrupt the rhythm. If Pukki is out (he has played a lot of club football this season), the replacements are either inconsistent or untested.

The challenge for the future is bringing out new prospects. Finland's form ahead of Euro qualifying was so good that this was the best chance they'd ever have of reaching the Euros. They won their Nations League group and that settled squad. Renewed confidence took them a long way. A lot of of players are over 30 now so the goal is to bring in the younger

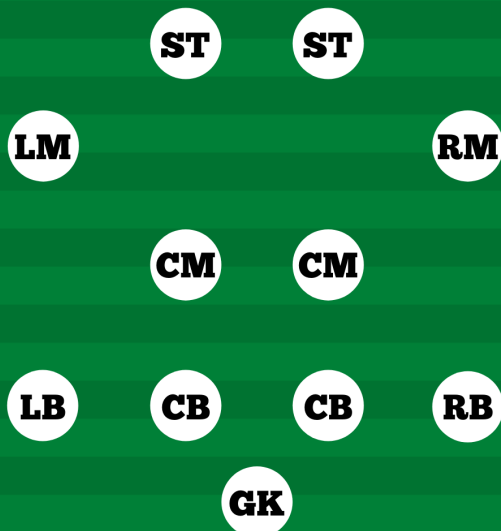
generation to keep it going for future tournaments.



Glen Kamara has earned 27 caps for Finland so far. Photo: RexFeatures

Predicted XI

4-4-2



GK Hradecky
RB Raitala
CB Toivio
CB Arajuuri
LB Uronen
CM Sparv
CM Kamara
RM Lod
LM Soiri
ST Tuominen
ST Pukki

Manager Markku Kanerva

Known by the nickname of "Rive", the 56-year-old has earned 59 caps for Finland as a player, but his professional career never went beyond Finland and Sweden - Kanerva spent most of his years at HJK

Helsinki. Behind the touchline, Kanerva started out as an assistant coach at HJK Helsinki too, where he assisted a former Sunderland player Keith Armstrong. Since 2004, Kanerva has been working with Finnish youth teams until in 2016, when he was appointed as the manager of the national team.



Opposition in Group B

Denmark

Euro record. Champions in 1992, Denmark have never played in a semi-final since and qualified only once after 2004. Their last attempt in 2012 ended in the group stage after losses to Germany and Portugal.

Qualification. Qualified by coming second in Euro Qualifiers Group D behind Switzerland and topping Ireland.

Manager. After contract expiry in 2020, Age Hareide was replaced by Kasper Hjulmand, who won eight matches from his first 11, including a 1-0 victory against England.

Main men. Having experience in Kasper Schmeichel and captain Simon Kjaer at the back, Denmark will be hoping to unleash their potential up front. A lot will depend on Christian Eriksen's form, while he will be looking for support from Yussuf Poulsen and Martin Braithwaite.

Chances. Lately they have been scoring for fun and certainly will be hoping to occupy a second spot in the group and to avoid strong opposition in the next stage.



Belgium

Euro record. Runners up in 1980, Belgium have only participated in three tournaments since. In 2016 they reached the quarter-finals but were eliminated by Wales 3-1 despite scoring first.

Qualification. With 10 wins out of 10, Belgium topped Group I in Euro Qualifiers, scoring 40 and conceding only three goals in the making.

Manager. In charge since 2016, Roberto Martinez has lived up to the potential with the team in the 2018 World Cup, where the Red Devils finished third.

Main men. Where do we begin? Belgium have one of the best sides this year with Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku, Eden Hazard and Dries Mertens up top. Solidity in defense provided by Tottenham's old pairing of Jan Vertonghen and Toby Alderweireld.

Chances. Belgians will be expecting nothing less than nine points from nine to start with. Belgium have demonstrated their power in 2018 and this time fans can only hope for better.



Russia

Euro record. Qualifying for the Euros for a fourth time in a row, Russia had their best result in 2008 when they reached the semi-final but then had to face soon-to-be champions Spain and lost 3-0.

Qualification. Were comfortably second in Euro Qualifiers Group I with only two losses to Belgium and left Scotland behind in third.

Manager. After a great World Cup, Stanislav Cherchesov extended his contract until 2022 and will be hoping to repeat his success on the home soil in Saint Petersburg.

Main men. With former Chelsea left-back Yuri Zhirkov still going strong at 37, Russia have nothing but experience to offer at the back while stars will be shining in midfield. The brightest ones include Monaco's Aleksandr Golovin and Atalanta's Aleksei Miranchuk.

Chances. In a tough group, unlike at the 2018 World Cup, Russia's chances of going through are slim and most likely they will stay in the first stage for the third Euros in a row.



Macedonia: Trust the process

BY: LAURYNAS PUIKYS

On a very rare occasion managers stay at football clubs or national teams for more than five years.

Every manager has ups and downs and when the latter starts dominating, heads start flying.

Not in the case of North Macedonia, however.

In charge since 2015, Igor Angelovski has managed to build a team that has reached its first major tournament in history after the federation put their trust in a relatively young manager.

“For me, Euro 2020 is a realization of the dream of all generations of Macedonian football players and coaches because this is the first participation of North-Macedonia, and I am happy and proud that we achieved this thing, led by me as a coach,” Angelovski said.

The 44-year-old did not have much experience before joining the national team, but the country’s federation took a gamble and it paid off.

After finishing only third in Group G in Euro Qualifiers, it was North Macedonia’s performance in the Nations League that allowed them to march on in the qualification.

Angelovski’s men topped Group 4 in League D in the Nations League and qualified for the playoffs, where they beat Kosovo and Georgia to book their Euro 2020 spot.

“Our strength is that we are like a family - our coach started making this team six years ago and he still has not made many changes to it.

“He connected the experience with younger and very talented players who came from our U21 team,” goalkeeper Martin Bogatinov said.

It was the 3-4-1-2 system that got Angelovski’s plan up and running.

Two wing-backs in Ezgjan Alioski and Stefan Ristovski very rarely get back to defend with two central midfielders providing cover for the back three.



Goran Pandev holds the record for most appearances and goals for North Macedonia.

Photo: RexFeatures

Both wing-backs deliver the ball to the penalty box where they have their main man waiting.

“The team spirit, the quality of the players and a leader such as Goran Pandev let us qualify for the first time in history,” Angelovski said.

In the playoff final against Georgia, the winning goal was scored by Genoa’s Pandev – the illustrious Macedonian forward that has enjoyed a successful career with Inter Milan, where he was instrumental in winning the treble in 2010.

Pandev is the captain and undoubtedly a talisman of the team – he holds the record for most appearances and goals with the red shirt.

“He is our leader; he is one of the best humans I have ever met in my life. All the world knows about his qualities on the pitch and I don’t need to say too much, because his career, goals, trophies and games speak about his quality as a football player.

“Playing with him it’s truly a pleasure, I believe not only for me but for everyone who was and is in our

national team,” Bogatinov said.

Going strong at the age of 37, Pandev is still one of the most important players for Bologna going forward in Serie A – this season he created eight goals in 26 matches so far.

However, North Macedonia have one more gem playing in Italy and he is ready to fill Pandev’s boots once he retires from his national duties.

It is Napoli’s Eljif Elmas. A versatile and tenacious 21-year-old attacking midfielder has impressed for club and country in his relatively short career.

This season Elmas has become a solid squad player for fourth-placed Napoli in Serie A.

His vision and technique stand out among all the North Macedonian players and he will be looking to support Pandev up front.

“It is above all a story of team cohesion, we finally have technical players like Elmas, Enis Bardhi, Arijan Ademi who bring the technical touch that we lacked.

“Before our team was just a physical team with no

ambition, but things have changed,” said Macedonian football writer Soner Ajroski.

Until Angelovski came in 2015, Macedonia did not come close to a European Championship.

Their best attempt was in 2008, when they came fifth in the qualification group and finished with 14 points, being the only team to beat the group winners Croatia and drawing with England.

The process under Slovenian manager Srečko Katanec, who performed well in that Euro 2008 qualifying, was halted in 2009 when he was sacked.

In six years time, until Angelovski came in 2015, North Macedonia had nine managers.

However, once they invested in their current coach, things started going well.

And the future is bright, says Macedonian football blogger Boban Aleksovski:

“Macedonia’s U21s have already had success. They played at U21 Euro 2017 in Poland. And they qualified as the first in the group, leaving France behind with

stars like Adrien Rabiot, Corentin Tolisso, Presnel Kimpembe and Benjamin Pavard.

“As many as eight players from this U21 generation are currently playing in the first team that will compete in the Euro 2020.”

However, experienced opponents’ threat is being felt in the Macedonian camp before the Euros.

Angelovski’s men will face Austria, Ukraine and the Netherlands.

“These are quality national teams, but we also have quality, we will go from match to match and I hope we will reach the quarter-finals.

“There is always room for improvement and this is what I always ask my players. To improve,” said Angelovski.

Bogatinov agrees: “We know about quality of all our opponents but we are going there to play football.

“We know it’s our first time in a tournament but when you don’t have pressure, you can make big things. I think we can be one of the biggest surprises this year.”

View from the stands

Aleksandar Zlateski, @macedonianfootball on Twitter

I expect North Macedonia to put an honest, respectable showing where the squad will display that qualifying was no fluke. There is no pressure, meaning that the players can play free and easy.

A good result would be reaching the Round of 16, a realistic result. Netherlands, Ukraine and Austria are very good sides, but they are not unbeatable. One win from three games should be enough to advance. I believe our team is capable of winning one game in the group.

Our most underrated player is defender Darko Velkovski. He does not get the notoriety of midfielders and attackers but he is a crucial player. When we play from the back, the squad relies on Darko's creativity to begin an attacking action. He is also good in the air, so I expect him to finally get much needed recognition on a big stage.

Our leader is Goran Pandev. He is the captain and all the players look up to him. He is the most accomplished player given what he has achieved at club level. When he speaks, other players listen. Nobody wants to disappoint him, and the players want to send him off (Pandev is retiring after Euro 2020) with a positive display.

Opponents should fear for Eljif Elmas. He is 21 years old and still somewhat unfinished product, but when he is on, he can be a difference maker, even against quality opposition. Elmas has the speed and dribbling skills to cause havoc, and he tends to play with much more freedom for the national team as opposed to his club Napoli.

It will all depend on availability of all the players. Our squad can't afford injuries to key players. A big national team, like France, can afford injuries because

they have plenty of depth, but we do not have that luxury. So, the key guys must be healthy and in-form for us to make noise in Euro 2020.

When we qualified I was thrilled. I can't say I was surprised because we qualified through League D of the Nations League. That was the lowest rung, so we had to beat Kosovo and Georgia, certainly no football superpowers. Being in League D made Euro 2020 a possibility. And the players took advantage of that.



Eljif Elmas played in 43 matches for Napoli this season. Photo: RexFeatures

Predicted XI

3-4-1-2

ST

ST

AM

LM

CM

CM

RM

CB

CB

CB

GK

GK Dimitrievski

CB Velkovski

CB Musliu

CB Bejtulaji

CM Ademi

CM Nikolov

RM Ristovski

AM Elmas

LM Alioski

ST Nestorovski

ST Pandev



Manager Igor Angelovski

In charge of North Macedonia since 2015, Angelovski is one of the longest-serving managers in Europe right now. Having played for minor Slovenian, Serbian and North Macedonian sides, Angelovski earned

his name as a manager. Before taking charge of the national team, Angelovski won the Macedonian First League with FK Rabotnički in 2014. It was the club's first league title since 2008 and the last one so far. After winning two Macedonian Cups in 2014 and 2015, Angelovski turned to manage the national side.

Opposition in Group C

Netherlands

Euro record. Champions in 1998, Netherlands have failed to qualify in 2016 and had two unimpressive performances in 2008 and 2012, exiting in the quarter-finals and the group stage respectively.

Qualification. Qualified by coming second in Euro Qualifiers Group C behind Germany and topping Northern Ireland.

Manager. Called by Jose Mourinho, "the worst manager in the history of the Premier League", Frank De Boer has only won four of his first nine matches with the Netherlands.

Main men. With captain Virgil Van Dijk's fitness being a priority for better results, the Netherlands have a much wider variety of talents to choose from up front. Georginio Wijnaldum, Donny van de Beek, Frenkie de Jong and Memphis Depay will be the difference makers this summer.

Chances. Lack of consistency in recent results and captain's injury offer little hope for the Netherlands that would face a tough group first.



Ukraine

Euro record. Participated twice in 2016 and as a host country in 2012 but were eliminated in the group stage both times.

Qualification. One of the surprise packages in Euro Qualifiers, Ukraine topped Group B and left Portugal and Serbia behind by winning eight and drawing two matches in a tough group.

Manager. Former Milan and Chelsea forward Andriy Shevchenko has improved Ukraine's performances by a country mile since taking over in 2016 and so far won 47% of all matches.

Main men. An influx of new talents has sky-rocketed Ukraine's ability in defense, with young prospects Vitaly Mykolenko and Mykola Matviyenko providing cover for Manchester City's Oleksandr Zinchenko operating in midfield for his national side.

Chances. After a perfect performance in qualifying, Ukraine will be hungry and surely are a team to watch this summer. Topping the group should be the aim.



Austria

Euro record. Qualifying only for the third Euros in history, Austria would like to forget their performance in 2016, when they finished bottom of the group with one point from possible nine.

Qualification. Came second in Euro Qualifiers Group G behind Poland and left their competitors at the Euros, North Macedonia, behind.

Manager. Former Bayer Leverkusen defender Franco Foda has been in charge since 2018 and is yet to make a viable impact as Austria have been inconsistent during his tenure.

Main men. After a poor Euro 2016, David Alaba and Marko Arnautovic will be looking to redeem themselves with the talent of RB Leipzig's forwards Marcel Sabitzer and Konrad Laimer.

Chances. With Alaba likely to play in midfield, defense once again looks shaky and it could decide Austria's fate at the Euros. Qualifying for the knockout matches will be tough once again. Austria have failed to reach the next stage in both previous attempts.



Notable rookie performances

BY: LAURYNAS PUIKYS

The first ever European Championship had four teams in it, and it probably looked more like a Club World Cup than a major tournament.

The tournament was held in France in 1960 and it only lasted five days.

Such four team format remained for five tournaments until 1980, when the number of teams was increased to eight.

After another four tournaments, the list of teams expanded again.

With three expansions in 60 years, in the European Championship history there has not been a single tournament without debutants.

Especially when in the 1996 edition, the number of teams doubled from eight to 16 and more countries had the chance to try their best on a European stage.

The 1996 tournament saw five rookies come in: Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, Switzerland and Turkey.

The Czechs even reached the final where they lost to Germany 2-1 thanks to a golden goal from Oliver Bierhoff.

Although increasing the number of teams has shown that it can make the tournament more unpredictable, we had to wait for another influx for 20 years.

It happened in Euro 2016, where instead of 16 teams, the organizers allowed 24 to enter.

Once the number of teams increased once again in 2016, the influx of new faces had to happen once more.

The last Euros in France saw five teams making their debut: Albania, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Slovakia and Wales.

Through the years, debutants have proven that they are coming to play football.

Here are the most notable performances from the rookies since 1996, when the number of teams doubled to 16.



CZECHIA, 1996

After Czechoslovakia's dissolution in 1992, Czech Republic entered Euro 1996 as a separate country for the first time in history.

The Czechs came to England well armored – had young stars in Pavel Nedved, Vladimir Smicer and Karel Poborsky.

Expectations were high for the debutants and they delivered.

Czech Republic came second in a tough group behind Germany while leaving 1994 World Cup runners up Italy behind.

In the quarter-final, strong Portugal with Luis Figo leading the line were stopped by the defensively solid Czechs – Poborsky scored the only goal and the rookies advanced.

France, that would go on to win the next two major tournaments in 1998 and 2000, were eliminated by the debutants as well.

After a goalless draw, the match went to penalties and Czech Republic did not place a foot wrong there.

Czechs scored six in a row until France's Reynald Pedros missed the decisive kick.

In the final, the debutants met their group opponents Germany once again.

Czechs were first to score until Oliver Bierhoff answered and took the game to extra time.

The German then struck again – his golden goal ended Czechs' hopes.

A 1-2 defeat, but a tournament to remember for the debutants who achieved their best Euros result in England up to this day.



CROATIA, 1996

A little bit overshadowed by the excellent Czech Republic, in 1996 Croatia also had their say in a first tournament since exiting Yugoslavia.

All the Croatians missed out on the 1992 tournament because Yugoslavia was banned from participating due to a civil war breaking out in the country.

Denmark then took their place and famously won the tournament four years prior to 1996.

So Croatians were hungry. With stars such as Davor Suker, Zvonimir Boban, Ropert Prosinečki and Slaven Bilič, they were packed with quality from back to front.

Croatia finished second in Group D behind Portugal and eliminated the defending champions Denmark and Turkey.

However, their journey ended quickly in the knockout stages.

The debutants lost against soon-to-be champions Germany 2-1.

A goal from Davor Suker evened the score but Germany struck again and ended Croatia's hopes of reaching the semi-final.

Alongside the tournament in 2008, reaching the quarter-final at the Euros in 1996 is Croatia's best achievement so far.

In 1996 it was a tournament to remember for Suker as well - he scored three of Croatia's five goals.

Only Alan Shearer with five scored more in the tournament than Suker, who was playing for Sevilla at that time.



ICELAND, 2016

If there is one debutant that stands out from this list to the English fans, it is Iceland. Where do we begin?

Coached by a part-time dentist Heimir Hallgrímsson and Swedish manager Lars Lagerback, Iceland were everyone's favourite, or at least second favourite team that summer of 2016.

Led by Gylfi Sigurdsson up front, in their first ever appearance Iceland had reached the quarter-finals after famously beating England 2-1 at Stade de Nice.

After a strong qualification, where Iceland left both Turkey and the Netherlands behind and finished second in the group behind Czech Republic, no one expected Lagerback's men to march on in France.

They quickly defied the odds at the Euros.

Iceland held current European champions Portugal to a 1-1 draw in the first match of their group.

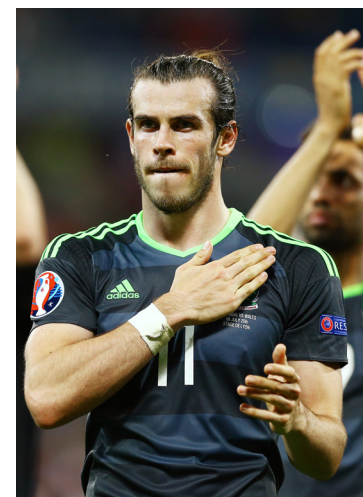
Scandinavians scored points in two of the remaining matches too.

They drew 1-1 with Hungary and beat toothless Austria 2-1.

Then the famous clash of the Round of 16 came.

Lagerback and Hallgrímsson completely outplayed Roy Hodgson, locked England's star-studded attack and found gaps to hurt frustrated Joe Hart in goal.

Iceland's victory over the Three Lions was so powerful that their defeat in the next round to France 2-5 was overshadowed by the damage that a country with 350,000 inhabitants had done.



WALES, 2016

Euro 2016 was the first tournament in history to feature Wales and the rookie went the furthest out of all British teams.

Chris Coleman's men came first in Group B and left England, Slovakia and Russia behind, but it was definitely not the climax of Wales' solid form.

Carried by the brilliant Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey, Wales lost to England in the group, but won the remaining two matches to gather six points.

Topping the group meant that Wales would avoid facing any of the big names in the knockout stages straight away.

Therefore, thanks to an own goal from Gareth McAuley, Wales had narrowly beaten Northern Ireland in the Round of 16.

What could have been a sign of things to come before the quarter-final with Belgium, Wales had proven sceptics wrong once again.

Clinical on the counter attack, Wales beat Belgium 3-1 as Hal Robson-Kanu created one of the best moments of the tournament.

After spinning and sending Thomas Meunier and Jason Denayer the wrong way, the forward sent the ball into the back of Thibaut Courtois' goal and gave Wales a 2-1 lead.

However, the journey finished in the semi-final, where the debutants lost to champions Portugal 2-0.

But Wales could hold their heads high - they became the first rookies to reach the semi-final after 1996.