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From zeroes to heroes

The sight of Swiss international Xherdan Shaqiri consoling his distraught young teammate Ruben Vargas touched many of us this summer. Standing behind the two was the fatherly figure of Vladimir Petkovic, the national coach already looking as if he had processed what was a painful end to Switzerland's Euro 2020 campaign.

They almost did it. After holding Spain to a one-all draw after 120 minutes of football in the quarter-finals, Switzerland were a penalty shoot-out away from reaching the last four. Alas, it was not to be. Vargas was not the only Swiss player to fail from the spot, but his miss was decisive.

It marked the emotional end of a rollercoaster campaign – for players and fans alike. At the beginning of Euro 2020, the Swiss public was less than enamoured with its multicultural national side. Petkovic's men were derided as pampered, overpaid prima donnas whose expensive cars and dyed hair meant more to them than giving their all on the pitch. Two victories later, and everything was fine. Switzerland managed to knock overconfident favourites France out of the tournament in a pulsating encounter. Back at home, Shaqiri and co. were no longer pariahs but heroes for progressing further in the competition than ever before.

Be that as it may, coach Petkovic – much criticised, now suddenly fêted – stepped down from his post a few weeks later to join French club Bordeaux. By which time Ruben Vargas's tears had probably dried.

JÜRIG STEINER

Granit Xhaka



Xherdan Shaqiri, Vladimir Petkovic

Yann Sommer



Ruben Vargas



Silvan Widmer, Ruben Vargas