Portugal started Euro 2008 as one of the favorites for the title, with the star player Cristiano Ronaldo as a major catalyst, supported by names like Pepe, Ricardo Carvalho, Deco and Simão, amongst others. But Portugal has another weapon, Luiz Felipe Scolari, who has an astonishing record of leading national team to the final stages of major tournament; 4th place in the World Cup 2006 and 2nd place in the Euro 2004 both with Portugal and winning the World Cup 2002 with his native Brazil.

Portugal lived up to the expectations during the group stage, quickly securing a sport in the quarterfinal winning its first 2 matches in Group A. However, their dream was shattered by “cold blooded” Germany, with Joachim Löw at the helm. Germany won the tactical battle, exploring Portugal’s weak points and being very successful in numbing the Portuguese strengths. Time for SoccerCoachingInternational to sum up and analyze the Portuguese matches and playing style during the tournament, and to point out why they were unable to live up to the expectations.

By: Hugo Vicente
Scolari has experimented and can play many different system of play with his Portuguese side. The preferred system is the 4-2-3-1 formation, but Portugal can easily switch to a 4-3-3 or 5-4-1 depending on the situation, with another option the 3-4-3 formation Scolari favored when his Brazil team won the 2002 FIFA World Cup.

“Their dream was shattered by ‘cold blooded’ Germany”

The formation
Portugal played with a combination between a 4-2-3-1 and 4-3-3 formation. Depending on how the positions were occupied by the players, Diagrams 1a and 1b explain the difference (and similarities) between the two formations.

In the 4-3-3 with a line defense, Portugal was strongly covered in the middle by two excellent players, Pepe and Ricardo Carvalho. The two side backs, Paulo Ferreira, playing on the left, almost without attacking, giving freedom to Bosingwa on the right side, to move up and down the field, exploring the space in front of him usually created with moves to the middle by the right wingers, Ronaldo or Simão. On midfield, Petit was in charge of all the defensive roles, while Moutinho and Deco were in charge of attacking. Moutinho acted more as a backup for his teammates, which created the perfect environment and gave the necessary freedom to Deco to be the most important player in all the attacking plays of the Portuguese team. In attack, the two wingers, Simão and Ronaldo, had orders to explore the 1v1 situations, and explode to the middle, searching for a shot or simple combinations with Deco or Nuno Gomes. This had to create space and explore the gaps between the opponent defenders.
Alternatives
Against Turkey, when the Portuguese midfield was having trouble to control the play, the system changed to a 4-4-2 in a diamond shape, with Moutinho and Meireles as inside midfielders, giving much more balance to the team. This proved to be a successful option.

Against Germany, when Scolari had to do something to turn the match around in his favor, he opted for a 4-4-2, but now with a classic approach: a line midfield, where Ronaldo was acting as a second striker, with two wide wingers.

Rather than being thought-out strategies both solutions seemed more like a last resource to turn the play around. Especially against Germany the strategy turned Portugal into a fragile team in crucial moments, because Germany counterattacked by playing with two defensive midfielders, not allowing Deco the space to dictate play. The German defensive midfielders also provided cover to the wingbacks, not allowing the Portuguese winger to explore the 1v1 situations. During most of the first half, Portugal where only able to play through the middle or opt for the long pass, this left the Portuguese forward to face the tall German defense by himself.
The attacking principles

Portugal is a team that likes to control the rhythm of the game, to be in charge at all times with great passing and moving quality. The first option is always to build up from the back, find Deco in midfield, who would then decide what the best attacking option is for the Portuguese attack. This usually meant looking for Nuno Gomes to initiate a wall pass or to find the wingers, who had moved to the middle in order to create space for themselves. The other frequent option in the Portuguese attacking patterns was to find Simão and Ronaldo, or Quaresma and Nani, on the flanks, who are all superb players in 1v1 situations. They would use this quality to create space in the middle in order to combine with Nuno Gomes, or create room in the right wing for Bosingwa to dribble to the end line and cross into the penalty area.

Portugal showed great mobility in the attacking third, with Deco and Moutinho appearing from the back, and this is what makes Portugal a hard opponent to play against, especially when inspiration is on their side. However, that same mobility makes Portugal vulnerable in counter attacking situations.
Defensive transitions

The attacking mentality of the Portuguese side was one of the details well explored by Germany. With constant overlaps to create space, and usually with six players involved in the attacking phase Portugal was unable to recover fast enough and to re-organize itself during loss of possession. This left a lot of open spaces, specially on midfield, which frequently made the central defenders get out of their positions, to avoid the opponents progression, creating even more space behind them, which is exactly what happened with Germany's first goal. Portugal organized themselves defending in the middle third, knowing their difficulties to deal with long balls into their defensive third, and ensuring they did not leave too much space behind the defensive line by playing with a zone defense. They applied pressure on the player in possession, trying to force the opponent to make mistakes. The general idea worked in the first games, mainly because of the speed of Pepe and Bosingwa, who allowed the team to recover quickly.

Portuguese Elastics

Organisation:
- 10 players divided in 5 couples
- 5 elastic bands

Progression:
- The 5 couples line up next to each other with 2 meters space between
- One player will stand behind the other
- The elastic band is put on the waist of the player in front.
- The front player tries to sprint; the other player tries to hold him in position by holding the elastic band and using his weight.
- After 10 seconds the players switch places

Portuguese Zig-Zag

Organisation:
- 6 cones
- 10 players

Progression:
- Cones are placed as shown in the image.
- Players line up in a row
- On turn the players will have to zig-zag between the cones as shown in the image
- After the last cone they will sprint 15 meters to the last cone.
- Repeat this exercise for at least 3 times

Portuguese Hoops

Organisation:
- 7 hoops
- 10 players
- 1 cone

Progression:
- Hoops are placed on the ground as shown in the image
- Players line up in a row
- On turn the players will have to jump the course.
- They have to land in the hoop with two legs, when there are two hoops placed next to each other they have to land in both hoops with a leg.
- The exercise ends with a 15 meter sprint after the last hoop.
- Repeat this exercise for at least 3 times
However, against Germany, Joachim Löw invited the Portuguese team to attack, and the created space proved lethal for the Portuguese side, as they were unable to effectively deal with the fast breaks (counterattacks) presented by the German side.

**Dead ball situations**

Another weak point of the Portuguese team was dealing with crosses into their own penalty area. When an opponent took a corner kick, Scolari kept 3 players in attack and used man-marking inside the box, with two players marking a zone. This could obviously create a healthy discussion about the kind of marking that is best suited for these situations, but the truth is that Portugal showed a lack of attitude in these situations, the players were not following their opponents, which caused Scolari’s strategy to fail. Another aspect in which the players failed their duties was the organization, as all too frequently you could see the players looking around, searching for their position and/or tasks at hand.

**Who scores, wins!**

It is always easier to point out mistakes after the fact. The truth is that Portugal played some good games and was able to create some great moments, but, small details in a competition like this can make the difference. Germany, were very successful and smart to explore those details. Portugal created plenty of scoring opportunities in all their games, but against Germany they failed to finish enough of those created opportunities. Football is a great game, and it continues to develop. It has become much faster, more intense, more technical, more tactical and more physical, but in the end there is only one thing the really matters and that has never changed: the winner is the team that scores the most goals! Portugal did show the quality to go on, they had excellent possession, they created great plays, the used the pitch, using depth, width, good passing, they have great players, but, to be successful, you have to win games and in competitions, nowadays, teams need to score much more with less opportunities, and that’s what Germany did!

**Diagram 7: Corners**

**Portuguese Cone play**

- Marked area: 20 meters width, 15 meters long
- 10 players
- 2 cones

**Progression:**
- 5 players take place at each cone
- Start at cone A
- The player at cone A passes the ball to cone B.
- After passing he will sprint to cone B and joins the line of players.
- The player at cone B directly passes the ball to cone A without controlling the ball
- After passing he will sprint to cone A and join the line.
- The next players in line will execute the exercise the same way, that way the ball will be into play constantly.

**Portuguese 5v5**

- Marked area: 20 meters width, 15 meters long
- 5 v 5
- Without goals

**Progression:**
- Play a regular 5 v 5 on possession
- Only 2 touches of the ball allowed
- Each 10 complete passes will give the team a point.

**GENERAL PURPOSE OF TRAINING PORTUGAL**

The training consisted of intense sprint work followed by a game with the focus on possession. This shows the way the Portuguese team plays; they have a strong focus on possession.