

PSV EINDHOVEN

PSV fans using the gents in the Eetcafe de Verlenging restaurant at the Philips Stadion can take aim at a tiny pink plastic football and try their skills at manoeuvring it into a miniature plastic goal on a little pitch fixed inside the urinal. It's just one small example of the lengths that PSV Eindhoven go to to make everyone feel looked after.

Talk to fans, players or staff about the atmosphere at the club and the word 'family' is always mentioned. They're not like Ajax at PSV. Contented local journalists tell tales of being invited into players' homes and given a sandwich. If Ruud van Nistelrooy, Jaap Stam or Arjen Robben are back in town, they'll pop over to De Herdengang training ground for a coffee. "PSV is Eindhoven; Eindhoven is PSV," says supporter Maico Verhagen, who has arrived early at the ground before PSV's Champions League clash with Monaco. Eindhoven is a neat but ugly industrial town of not much more than 200,000 people.

Every other Saturday, nearly a fifth of them can be found in the Philips Stadion. Few PSV fans live outside south-west Holland and the traditionally less jovial northerners look down their noses at the south west. When Guus Hiddink arrived in 2002, he began to give the cosy club culture a few gentle elbows in the ribs. PSV are still a family, just a more professional one. Where once good intentions allowed casual attitudes to go unchecked, Hiddink has pulled up the club socks. He's not domineering, but if he hears any part of the club is not running as smoothly as it might, he'll intervene. Graft is now part of everyone's brief.

The fans like Hiddink. He returned to the Philips Stadion after implausibly guiding South Korea to fourth place at the 2002 World Cup, immediately took PSV to the Eredivisie title and is now poised to win another. The championship has been passed around between PSV, Ajax and Feyenoord since the 1970s, so titles don't buy the fans' adulation – as Bobby Robson discovered. But during Hiddink's first spell at the club, PSV won the European Cup in 1988 and he still radiates a Ready Brek-style afterglow.

Philips Sport Vereniging (Philips Sports Club) was born after the electronics company threw a sports festival to mark 100 years of Dutch independence in 1913. Besides the occasional title and a Dutch Cup, PSV didn't enjoy sustained success for another 60-odd years. Willy van der

Behind the scenes at PSV as Guus Hiddink's side play their first UEFA Champions League knock-out match, Alison Ratcliffe finds a friendly club where style matters, but not as much as results

Photos Matthew Impey/Backpage images

Art &

Kuijen's high-kicking statue stands sentry-like outside the main gate of the Philips Stadion, just across from Coen Dillen who scored 43 goals in 1956/57, still an Eredivisie record. Left-winger Van der Kuijen was the inspiration for the 1970s PSV side that won three titles, a Dutch Cup and the 1978 UEFA Cup, beating Barcelona in the semi-final. In the 1980s Ruud Gullit was the talisman as PSV won six titles in seven seasons.

Gullit left, and PSV won the European Cup. Nigh on stole off with it, in fact, while the rest of Europe was looking the other way. PSV averaged a goal per game and didn't win a match after the second round, beating Benfica on penalties in the final. Ring any bells? Today's PSV, newly bereft of Mateja Kezman and Arjen Robben, averaged a goal per game in the group stages of this season's Champions League and beat only group losers Rosenborg. As in 1987/88, it hasn't always been pretty, but PSV have at last reached the knockout stages – at the ninth time of asking.

"In Holland we have our way of playing," says Hiddink. "We like to be creative, to control, to create a lot of opportunities. But in Europe it's not so





PSV coach Guus Hiddink gets in the picture, far left, as the groundsman prepares the pitch, left, for the clash with Monaco at the Philips Stadion, guarded by statues of Willy van der Kuijen and Coen Dillen, above

easy to create openings. We've made progress tactically compared to a year or two ago. If you don't do that then you're an immature team in European terms. We've made a lot of mistakes in previous European campaigns because we played a much too open style and were punished. We've tried to recruit and develop players suited to European football."

No apologies then. At the press conference before PSV's first ever game in the Champions League knockout stages, at home to Monaco, Hiddink convinces as the boss of a sleek and efficient European machine. How does he coordinate a cosmopolitan squad that includes three Brazilians, two Koreans, a Swiss, a Peruvian, an American, a Ghanaian and a Dane? "I have the advantage of speaking five languages so it's not a problem." Unsmiling and expressionless, but patient, he fields questions eloquently and at length.

Watching PSV train at the Philips Stadion the same morning, it's clear they are their manager's squad. While a band of journalists and snappers hop about on the touchline dodging the melting snow falling off the roof of the stadium, the players look serious and driven. Ball after ball is →

powered from the centre circle towards the corner flag, drilled by a waiting player into the box, plucked out of the air by two attackers and smashed into a billowing goal net. The booming of cleanly hit footballs echoes around the stadium to the rattling of terraces being swept in preparation for the game.

Monaco test out the pitch under floodlights in the evening. They look relaxed. A game of piggy in the middle is raucous and full of boisterous challenges. To finish, they play an eleven-a-side game on a less-than-half-size pitch. Yet Didier Deschamps's press conference tends towards the tense. He's not known for his cuddly relationship with the press, but there's more to his impatience than that.

"To what extent is last season's final a point of reference?" "How would you compare this season's Monaco side with last season's?" "You must be inspired by the success of last season's side?" Deschamps looks like a man haunted by his own success. "We have to forget last season," says Monaco captain Julien Rodriguez. There's no denying that after the departures of Fernando Morientes, Ludovic Giuly, Jérôme Rothen, Dado Prso and Hugo Ibarra Monaco are a fundamentally different side.

PSV also lost an entire forward line when Robben, Kezman and Dennis Rommedahl departed, and the transfers of experienced keeper Ronald Waterreus and centre-back Kevin Hofland left a hole in the defence. But while Hiddink's rebuilding is ahead of schedule, Deschamps has seen the odd hitch. In October and November, apart from one League Cup tie, the only games Monaco won were in the Champions League, where their home form ensured their qualification despite some dubious away results.

But by Christmas a structure began to take shape. Monaco have flown to Holland in fourth spot in Ligue 1 after a 1-1 draw with leaders Lyon and with reason to feel positive about a trip to Eindhoven: "It was Holland that was the trigger for our season, not Real Madrid or Chelsea or Deportivo, which were more spectacular," says Patrice Evra of Monaco's 2003/04 group game in Eindhoven. No French team had ever won or even scored at the



"I'm expecting the same kind of battle from PSV as last season"

Philips Stadion before last season but Monaco beat PSV 2-1.

"It was the sort of match where you can look in the mirror and tell yourself you've done a good job," says Evra. "Just thinking about it gives me stomach cramps. They were all 6ft 3in! It was a battle. Only the war paint was missing. I'm expecting the same kind of match as last season." Though cagey in Europe, PSV are Dutch at heart. They've scored almost 2.7 goals per game to go top of the Eredivisie and have the happy habit of scoring four in their league games. "It wasn't easy to replace Robben, Rommedahl and Kezman because I had to replace the whole production line," says Hiddink. "But we managed to get in some promising young players who no one had heard of in Holland or Europe and we mixed them with experienced players. I didn't expect it to go so well so soon though."

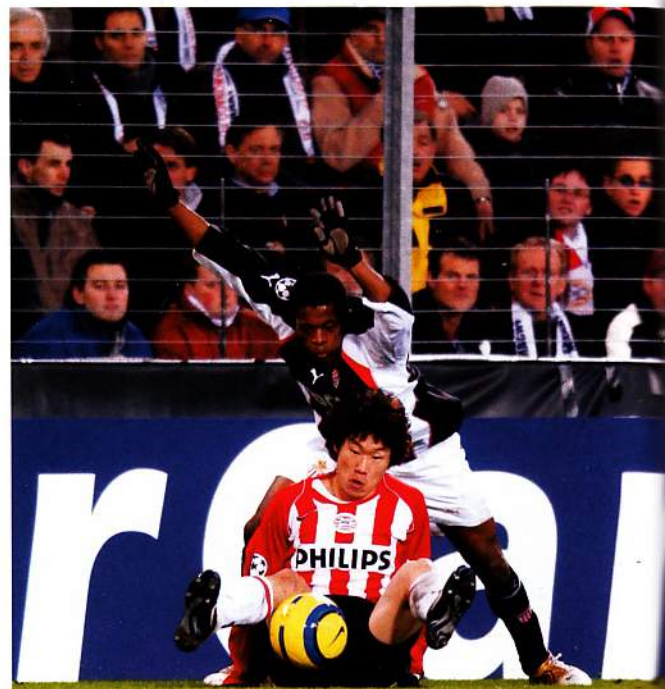
"We love you PSV, we do! We love you PSV we do..." The song over the PA minutes before PSV versus Monaco kicks off is sung at the dawdling pace and with the overwrought emotion of a love ballad. Gradually it speeds up into a frantic cheesy dance tune. Scarves are held aloft Anfield-style by the supporters in the east stand. A military march kicks in and the scarves twirl on cue. A tiny enclave of Monaco fans perch at the top of their lofty section of seating, the empty expanse below them brightened with a giant Monaco shirt and a banner for the Inferni, Monaco's Parisian supporter group.

Alex scores. Everyone had settled in for the long haul, the tactical duelling, the chess games, the pitting of wits. But after eight minutes the Monaco defence fall asleep and the ball is in their net. Mark van Bommel's corner meets the head of the tall Brazilian centre-back as he rises above a Monaco defence scattered around like toy soldiers.

The match is Alex's. After scoring, his defensive performance is immense. It's like watching a boy hold his little brother at arm's length while the youngster kicks and punches and meets only air. He has the sort of game where supporters breathe a sigh of relief when they see the ball heading his way. Wilfred Bouma, who from the stands looks like a slightly squatter version of Alex, is a worthy central-defensive partner. Monaco float aimless long balls towards tall gangly centre-forward Emmanuel Adebayor and Alex and Bouma swat them away with elegant nonchalance. Ji-Sung Park, the



Handshakes all round, above, as PSV hope they hold the keys to success, left. Ji-Sung Park effectively, if not elegantly, shields the ball from Patrice Evra, below, in a game watched by 32,000 fans. If nothing else, Monaco were smartly attired, right, for a game in which keeper Flavio Roma was kept busy, far right





right-hand prong in the front row of PSV's 4-3-3 is the bull in Monaco left-back Evra's china shop. His touch is not the most refined, but his speed, enthusiasm and perseverance are making an impact. Young-Pyo Lee, the other player Hiddink brought back from his South Korea sojourn, is unshowy, tidy and technical. He looks accomplished at left-back and from time to time links up neatly with Peruvian youngster Jefferson Farfán on the left.

PSV's midfield trio of Van Bommel, Philip Cocu and Johann Vogel are efficient in midfield. Van Bommel is the master puppeteer, unfazed by playing on the left. Wide forwards Farfán and Park constantly stretch Monaco, but rarely break through. As the game goes on, Monaco's defences become increasingly disciplined. Evra has Park sussed and he is scarcely heard of again. But the push for an away goal never materialises. On-loan Barcelona striker Javier Saviola was billed by Deschamps as a man for the big occasions, which in reality are practically the only occasions he has produced for Monaco this season. But he is innocuous. Beaten 1-0, Monaco seem to be putting all their faith in the galvanising effect – and perhaps the awkward rock-hard playing surface – of Stade Louis II in the return leg.

"I thought they would pressure us more but the pressure never came," Bouma muses later in the whitewashed corridor outside the dressing room. Evra is candid: "We didn't do enough on the ball and we didn't play our own game. Okay, we were solid. Okay, we didn't back out of the physical challenge. But when we had the ball we didn't know what to do with it."

PSV are less fluid in the Champions League. Farfán and Park stick to their own wings. "Normally I play a more attacking style," right-back André Ooijer tells me. His post-match club suit has trouser creases as sharp as his angular limbs and features. "But Guus Hiddink asked me to hang back and support Alex and Bouma. Nothing surprised us about the way they played. In our team talks we had them totally turned inside out. We watched some video footage and talked it over as we usually do in the Champions League."

Cocu, much more affable than his sinister glare suggests, is carrying an

They were all six foot three! Only the **war paint** was missing"



injury. He knows he wasn't at his best, but is content the midfield gave nothing away. "Hiddink asked the midfield to set out the lines, to give some coaching, to organise the team. Van Bommel was playing more offensively and it was my job to control."

And the rather dour football? "When you see Porto's success last season... At times it's not so nice for the crowd, but there's a lot of money involved," says Bouma, laughing apologetically. But then the crowd aren't too fussed: "It doesn't matter to us whether we're playing attractive football – qualifying for the next round is what counts for the supporters," PSV fan Maico assured me before the game.

PSV have grown to depend financially on the Champions League. Though the fans are keener on European glory, if you ask Hiddink or any of the players if their priority is the Champions League or the Eredivisie, they don't hesitate to pick the latter. The league is, after all, a passport back to the Champions League the following year. Five to ten years ago, PSV needed Champions League football once every three years to maintain their budget. Now they need it every year to stay at the same level.

The Dutch market is so much smaller than those of the major European leagues that money from TV coverage of the Eredivisie is negligible. Feyenoord won the UEFA Cup in 2002 and made less money than Milan did from the three home games they played before being eliminated in the group stage of the Champions League. Ever more creative marketing and repackaging of the stadium facilities prop PSV up.

The club now has a more conventional relationship with parent company Philips. Once, if the club needed a new player, someone would trot along to the office of the president of Philips and ask for more money. Now the president might offer a cup of coffee and his best wishes, but never the key to the coffers: for the past nine years PSV have agreed two to three-year sponsorship deals with Philips just like any other club and its sponsors.

One very small example of PSV's creative marketing is PSV Monopoly, a snip at £34.50 (£49.95), but with Kezman and Robben still on the box. The Electric Company is a very useful asset for PSV and bankruptcy is certainly not an issue. But, from Romário to Kezman, Ronaldo to Robben, the club's game plan relies on selling improved properties to richer players. ★

