

French leave contribution

BY PAUL KENNEDY

France's contribution to the development of the game has been well documented.

It was a Frenchman, FIFA president Jules Rimet, who started the World Cup in 1930.

French sportswriter Gabriel Hanot came up with the idea for the European Cup, launched in 1955.

And the European Nations Cup, now the European Championship, was the brainchild of another Frenchman, Henri Delaunay, in the mid-50s.

The success of the France-hosted European Championship in 1984 is largely responsible for popularizing the tournament.

UEFA went to an eight-team tournament in 1980, but it was a bust in Italy, where the European Championship was plagued by poor crowds and even poorer soccer.

France '84, by contrast, featured big crowds for all matches and some of the most exciting matches in European Championship history.

The tournament marked the arrival of Denmark. Danish Dynamite exploded in Lyons, where the Danes crushed Yugoslavia, 5-0, in their second group game.

An 18-year-old Enzo Scifo, the son of Italian immigrants, emerged as the new Belgian star.

The tournament was also notable for the decline of West Germany, going out in the group stage of



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an international tournament for the only time in its history.

And, of course, there was France, at the pinnacle of its game, too inexperienced two years earlier to hold on to a 3-1 lead against West Germany at the '82 World Cup and too old two years later to stay with the Germans in the semifinals at the '86 World Cup.

France '84 was Michel Platini's tournament. The French midfielder put on the best display of marksmanship at an international championship

in the last 30 years.

Platini scored nine goals in five games to lead France to the title. He scored in all five games and had hat tricks in consecutive games against Belgium and Yugoslavia. He came within two votes of being a unanimous choice for European Player of the Year, the most overwhelming pick in the 44-year history of the award.

France wasn't simply a one-man team, though.

The French midfield featured Platini, Jean Tigana, Alain Giresse and Luis Fernandez, who was added after the '82 World Cup.

It was Tigana who saved France with his tireless work in midfield in the semifinals against Portugal.

France went behind, 2-1, in overtime and was within six minutes of being eliminated before it recovered. Jean-Francois Domergue, a little known defender playing in the place of the suspended Manuel Amoros, tied the score with his second goal of the game with six minutes left, and Tigana made one last run to set up Platini for the winner in the 120th minute.

Coach Michel Hidalgo retired after the final, a 2-0 win over Spain that proved anticlimactic after the France-Portugal thriller in Marseilles.

(Paul Kennedy is the managing editor of Soccer America.)

France wasn't simply a one-man team in 1984, when it won the European Championship.

