



**Real Madrid's Javier Portillo (left) tries to shake off Terrassa defender Ruben in the Spanish giant's King's Cup series against minor-league opposition.**

GUSTAU NACARINO/REUTERS

## CUP SEASON

### Moment in the spotlight for soccer's minnows

The magic of a country's cup competition is that teams big and small take the field together with the same dreams of glory.

One victory is all a "minnow" needs to put its town or village on the map or pay off its debts. Clubs often have multiple entries in the national cup. The excitement comes when the reserve team matches or surpasses the pro team — or they are drawn against each other.

The only thing in American sports that matched the aura of cup play was Indiana's all-comers high school basketball tournament, made famous by the film "Hoosiers" but abandoned, unfortunately, in favor of class divisions by school size.

Here's how small teams have fared in Continental Europe's major soccer nations:

**FRANCE.** Calais Racing Union Football Club drew a spotlight on the ailing port city and injected new life into the French Cup when the Fourth Division amateur team reached the final, falling to Nantes, 2-1, in 2000.

No other country has a history of such small clubs reaching the first-round proper, the entry point for First Division clubs.

Last year, Fourth Division Libourne St. Seurin beat First Division clubs Metz and Lille. This year, it knocked defending league champion Lyon out.

Ninth Division Villeurbanne Algerienne, a team of Algerian immigrants from the Lyons suburbs, became the smallest club ever to reach the final 64. Seventh Division Lambres-les-Douai went one step further,

advancing to the round of 32.

**GERMANY.** Three times in the last decade Third Division clubs reached the German Cup final; Hertha Berlin's amateur team (1993), Energie Cottbus (1997) and Union Berlin (2001).

This year, Regionalliga (Third Division) Unterhaching has reached the quarterfinals, where it faces Bayer Leverkusen. In 2000, when it was in the First Division, Unterhaching denied Leverkusen the Bundesliga title.

It beat Bayer, 2-0, on the last day of the season and gave the title to Unterhaching neighbor Bayern Munich.

**ITALY.** The structure of the Coppa Italia favors the big clubs. The top eight teams enter in the round of 16. Each round is a two-leg affair. Only one minor-league team (Ancona) has reached the Coppa Italia final in the past two decades, and it was crushed by Sampdoria, 6-1, on aggregate.

**NETHERLANDS.** Last year, Ajax and Ajax 2, its second team, reached the semifinals. Ajax 2 fell on penalties to Utrecht, which in turn fell to Ajax in the final. This year, Ajax and, Ajax 2 are both in the round of 16 of the Amstel Cup. One of Ajax's stars is 19-year-old Stefano Seedorf, brother of Clarence Seedorf.

**PORTUGAL.** Riot police guarded Benfica's locker room from hundreds of fans screaming insults after Benfica's 1-0 loss at home to Division IIB (Third Division) Gondomar. The loss prompted the ouster of Coach Jesualdo Ferreira. Last season, IIB Leixoes reached the final, falling to Sporting, 1-0.

**SPAIN.** One of the rare meetings between teams from the same club took place in 1980 when Real Madrid beat its "B" team from the Second Division, Castilla, 6-1, in the King's Cup final.

For the second year in a row, powerhouse Barcelona was ousted by a Third Division team. Four other First Division teams lost to Third Division opposition in the first round.

Real Madrid survived a scare in the round of 16, beating Second Division Terrassa, 7-5, on aggregate.