



GELSENKIRCHEN: This file photo taken on June 26, 1974 shows Dutch midfielder Johann Cruyff dribbling past Argentinean goalkeeper Daniel Carnevali on his way to scoring a goal during the World Cup quarterfinal soccer match between the Netherlands and Argentina on June 26, 1974. — AFP

DUTCH LEGEND JOHAN CRUYFF DIES AT 68 AFTER CANCER BATTLE

BARCELONA: Johan Cruyff, one of the greatest footballers in history, died yesterday at the age of 68 from lung cancer, his family announced. The Dutchman "died peacefully in Barcelona, surrounded by his family after a hard-fought battle with cancer," said a statement on Cruyff's official website. "It's with great sadness that we ask you to respect the family's privacy during their time of grief."

Cruyff won three European Cups as a player with Ajax Amsterdam and Ballon d'Or titles in 1971 with Ajax and 1973 and 1974 with Barcelona, where he starred from 1973 to 1978. Cruyff is considered one of the best four players in history alongside Pele of Brazil, Diego Maradona of Argentina and France's Michel Platini.

With his precision passes, speed, technique and goalscoring ability,

Cruyff set new standards as a player. He was the incarnation of Total Football that took the Dutch team to the World Cup final in 1974. He inspired a new generation of footballers. "Playing football is very simple, but playing simple football is the hardest thing there is," he once said. As a coach, Cruyff led Barcelona to their first European Cup title in 1992. Cruyff was once a heavy smoker who gave up after heart bypass surgery in 1991. He started sucking lollipop on the touchline at Barcelona games. Cruyff also appeared in a Catalan government advert, saying: "Football has given me everything in life, tobacco almost took it all away."

Football world in mourning

He revealed in October last year that he had lung cancer. He said in February that he had received "very positive"

results about his battle. "Right now, I have the feeling that I am 2-0 up in the first half of a match that has not finished yet. But I am sure that I will end up winning," he added in a statement. News of his death still came as a shock to the football world and tributes quickly flooded in. "He was the best player of all time," French legend Michel Platini told AFP. "I have lost a friend, the world has lost a great man. I admired him," Platini added.

"The '14' will never be the same. RIP Johan Cruyff," said modern-day Spanish hero Xabi Alonso, now with Bayern Munich, on Twitter in a tribute referring to Cruyff's number 14 shirt. "Goodbye to one of the legends of the history of football," said Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos. While Cruyff made his name at Ajax, where he started at the age of 17, he made his football home in Barcelona.

"BarÁa soon began to reap the rewards as the Dutch magician helped BarÁa to the league title in his first season, and went on to win his second and third Ballon d'Or," the club said in a tribute. "He quickly became an icon for BarÁa. "His acrobatic strike against Atletico Madrid and the 5-0 win at the

Santiago Bernabeu (against Real Madrid) in 1974, among many other great moments, will live long in the memory of BarÁa fans." Cruyff returned as manager in 1988. "He was in the dugout for eight seasons, during which time he led the club through its most successful ever period up until that point." Barcelona won four consecutive league titles and their first ever European Cup in May 1992 at Wembley, beating Sampdoria of Italy 1-0. Cruyff was named Europe's player of the century in 1999. — AFP



DORTMUND: Dutch forward Johan Cruyff jumps to hit the ball into the net for his team's second goal against Brazil in their World Cup football match. — AP

FIVE JOHAN CRUYFF QUOTES ON FOOTBALL

BARCELONA: Johan Cruyff was an artist with the ball but also had his inimitable way of describing his relationship with football. Here are five classic Cruyff quotes:

Simplicity

"Playing football is very simple, but playing simple football is the hardest thing there is".

Juggling

"Technique is not about being able to juggle a ball 1,000 times. Anyone can do that by practicing. Then you can work in the circus. Technique is about passing the ball with one touch, at the right speed, onto the right foot of your team mate."

Football wealth

"Why couldn't you beat a richer club? I've never seen a bag of money score a goal."

Hot air

"After you've won something, you're no longer 100 percent, but 90 percent. It's like a bottle of carbonated water where the cap is removed for a short while. Afterwards there's a little less gas inside."

Time flies

"When you play a match, it is statistically proven that players actually have the ball three minutes on average. So, the most important thing is what do you do during those 87 minutes when you do not have the ball. That is what determines whether you're a good player or not." — AFP



BARCELONA: In this Dec 22, 2009 file photo Dutch coach Johan Cruyff looks on during a friendly soccer match of Catalunya against Argentina at the Camp Nou stadium. — AP

BELGIUM MOVES INTERNATIONAL, EURO HAS 'CONTINGENCY PLANS'

BRUSSELS: Belgium on Wednesday moved a friendly international against Portugal away from Brussels after the militant attacks on the city while UEFA said it has "contingency plans" for the European Championships in France. But Europe's governing body and the French government insisted that Euro 2016 will go ahead and there will be no games behind closed doors.

Belgium, the world's top ranked team, had been due to play Portugal in Brussels next Tuesday. But a day after the attacks on Brussels airport and the city metro in which 31 people died, the Belgian federation said the match had been called off for "security reasons." Portugal's federation later announced that the two countries had agreed to play the match the same day in the Portuguese city of Leiria instead.

"I wanted to play in Brussels, at home, because I am against fear," said Belgium coach Marc Wilmots. "I wanted to play here to show them (the terrorists) that despite the terrible events, which shook the country, life goes on for the majority of people." The Islamic State assaults on Paris and Brussels over the past four months have increased the security spotlight on the 24-nation European Championships due to start in Paris on June 10.

One of the deadly suicide attacks in Paris on November 13 was against the Stade de France and security will again be heightened when France play Russia there on Tuesday, authorities said. France's games against the Netherlands in Amsterdam on Friday has also been confirmed. UEFA and France say they are determined that Euro 2016 should go ahead. French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said not holding the tournament would be "a victory for terrorists." UEFA also expressed confidence in the money-spinning event but added that it had planning for "crisis situations." — AFP