

On 4 July 2004, at the Estádio da Luz in Lisbon, a seismic shock rippled through the footballing world. Greece, an unfancied outsider managed by **Otto Rehhagel**, defeated tournament hosts Portugal 1-0 to lift their first major international trophy. The final was not just a David versus Goliath fairy tale; it was a masterclass in *defensive organisation*, tactical discipline, and the raw unpredictability of football.

In this post, we'll dissect the tactical nuances that defined the match, exploring how Greece's resolute structure and moment of clinical opportunism shattered the odds stacked by bookmakers like **Oddstrader**, confounded expectations set by **FIFA** and **UEFA** rankings, and ultimately rewrote the script on football favourites.



Pre-match Expectations and Why Portugal Were Favourites

Leading into the final, Portugal were widely expected to prevail. Boasting attacking talents such as Luís Figo, Rui Costa, and a young Cristiano Ronaldo, the host nation had dazzled in the knockout stages. Their possession statistics reflected dominance—they averaged over 60% possession throughout Euro 2004, overwhelming opponents with relentless pressure and intricate passing.

Meanwhile, Greece had advanced through cautious, defensively resilient performances, often securing narrow 1-0 wins or penalties. Their *expected goals (xG)* figures were modest, reflecting a team set up to frustrate rather than entertain. Oddstrader's odds had Greece at long odds prior to the tournament and even in the final, signalling faith in Portugal's attacking superiority.

Otto Rehhagel's Tactical Blueprint

Otto Rehhagel, a veteran German coach renowned for his pragmatic approach, crafted a game plan centred on ironclad defensive organisation. His side lined up in a disciplined 4-4-2 structure that prioritised:

- **Compactness:** Closing spaces in central areas to prevent Portugal's creative midfielders from threading passes.
- **Man-marking:** Especially on key players like Luís Figo, choking their influence.

- **Low defensive block:** Inviting Portugal to probe but not bite, maintaining a solid shape just outside the penalty area.

The system demanded intense concentration and stamina, with the team operating as a cohesive unit rather than relying on individual flair. This conservative but effective method was derided by some as negative football—but as the match unfolded, it proved near impenetrable.

The Match Kick-Off and Early Dynamics

Portugal took early control, with their higher possession and probing approach reflecting their efforts to assert authority on home soil. The initial fifteen minutes saw Portugal dominate the ball, registering an estimated 65% possession in this phase and creating a handful of promising chances.

However, the critical trigger moment—the precise pivot when momentum shifted—came around the 40th minute. After Greece's defence absorbed mounting pressure, **Angelos Charisteas** rose highest to nod in a corner, breaking the deadlock. This header not only stunned the Portuguese fans but also exerted tangible psychological pressure on the hosts.

Why That Goal Changed Everything

This goal was not just a scoreline change but a full tactical pivot:



1. Portugal now had to chase the game, leaving more space behind their advancing full-backs.
2. Rehhagel's side tightened even more, confident in their lead and able to absorb pressure even further.
3. The Greek players' defensive cohesion grew, while Portugal's anxiety visibly increased.

From this moment, possession statistics flipped to a frustrating but ineffective domination for Portugal, with Greece ceding up to 70% possession at times but conceding only one quality chance for the rest of the match.

Defensive Organisation: Greece's Fortress

What set Greece apart tactically was their exceptional defensive organisation—Rehhagel drilled his squad in zonal coverage and coordinated pressing when required. The line rarely wavered and was aided by a [why brazil lost 7-1](#)

disciplined midfield dropping deep to stifle passing lanes. The 'trigger moment' for many observers was Greece's ability to maintain composure under sustained siege, demonstrating that defensive football at its highest level demands precise positioning rather than reactive panic.

Portugal's star forwards were starved of space, forced into speculative shots or blocked crosses. Even the expected goals (xG) tally for Portugal hovered around 1.3 for the entire game—a low figure considering their dominance in play.

Football Unpredictability and Historic Upsets

Greece's triumph is a textbook example of football's boundless unpredictability. Despite Portugal's technical superiority and fervent home support, the match defied pre-tournament forecasts—a pattern reflected in many famous knockout and final upsets throughout history:

- Denmark's 1992 European Championship win after last-minute inclusion
- Leicester City's 2016 Premier League triumph against all odds
- Greece's own Euros 2004 run sparking disbelief worldwide

These moments underline how overconfidence among favourites can paradoxically lead to tactical rigidity or psychological collapse when faced with unusual challenges. Greece exemplified mental strength, exploiting every lapse and uncertainty.

Psychology and Momentum Swings

The psychological narrative of the final is as crucial as the tactical. After Charisteas's goal, Portugal's frustration became palpable, sapping patience and clarity. England's famed analyst Alan Shearer once remarked that momentum shifts are "the hidden flow of football"; here, it was visible as Portugal's tempo dropped, and their usually fluid passing game turned desperate.

Conversely, Greece's players grew in belief and confidence—a classic momentum swing—embodying the "dogged underdog" mentality that can destabilise even the most skilled opponents.

Legacy and Lessons from the Euro 2004 Final

For coaches, players, analysts, and fans, the Greece vs Portugal final remains a compelling case study in tactical planning and execution:

1. **Discipline beats flair:** Cohesion and organisation can neutralise superior individual talent.
2. **Psychological resilience is key:** Momentum and belief can act as force multipliers.
3. **Never underestimate the underdog:** Betting firms like Oddstrader, despite sophisticated models, remind us that odds are probabilities, not predestinations.

UEFA continues to highlight this final in its archives as a defining moment showcasing football's beautiful unpredictability, and FIFA often references it in coaching circles as an example of how tactical discipline and mental strength can overturn expected outcomes.

In conclusion, the 2004 final was not a fluke but a masterful demonstration of how **Otto Rehhagel's** exacting preparation, the timely genius of **Angelos Charisteas**, and exceptional *defensive organisation* combined to deliver one of the most memorable upsets in football history.