

# Looking Forward

## Fernando Torres

***For many years Spain have been regarded as underachievers. Despite a constant flow of top class players, the Spanish have failed to impress at a major tournament in over 20 years. But all that may be about to change as a new generation of young stars have emerged, giving Spanish fans great hope going into the UEFA European Championships this summer.***

Arsenal's Cesc Fabregas is rapidly proving himself to be one of the most complete midfielders in the world, while 21-year-old Sergio Ramos has established himself at the heart of both the Real Madrid and Spain defence. However, if Spain are to mount a serious challenge in Austria and Switzerland it will be down to their mercurial young striker, Fernando Torres, to score the goals.

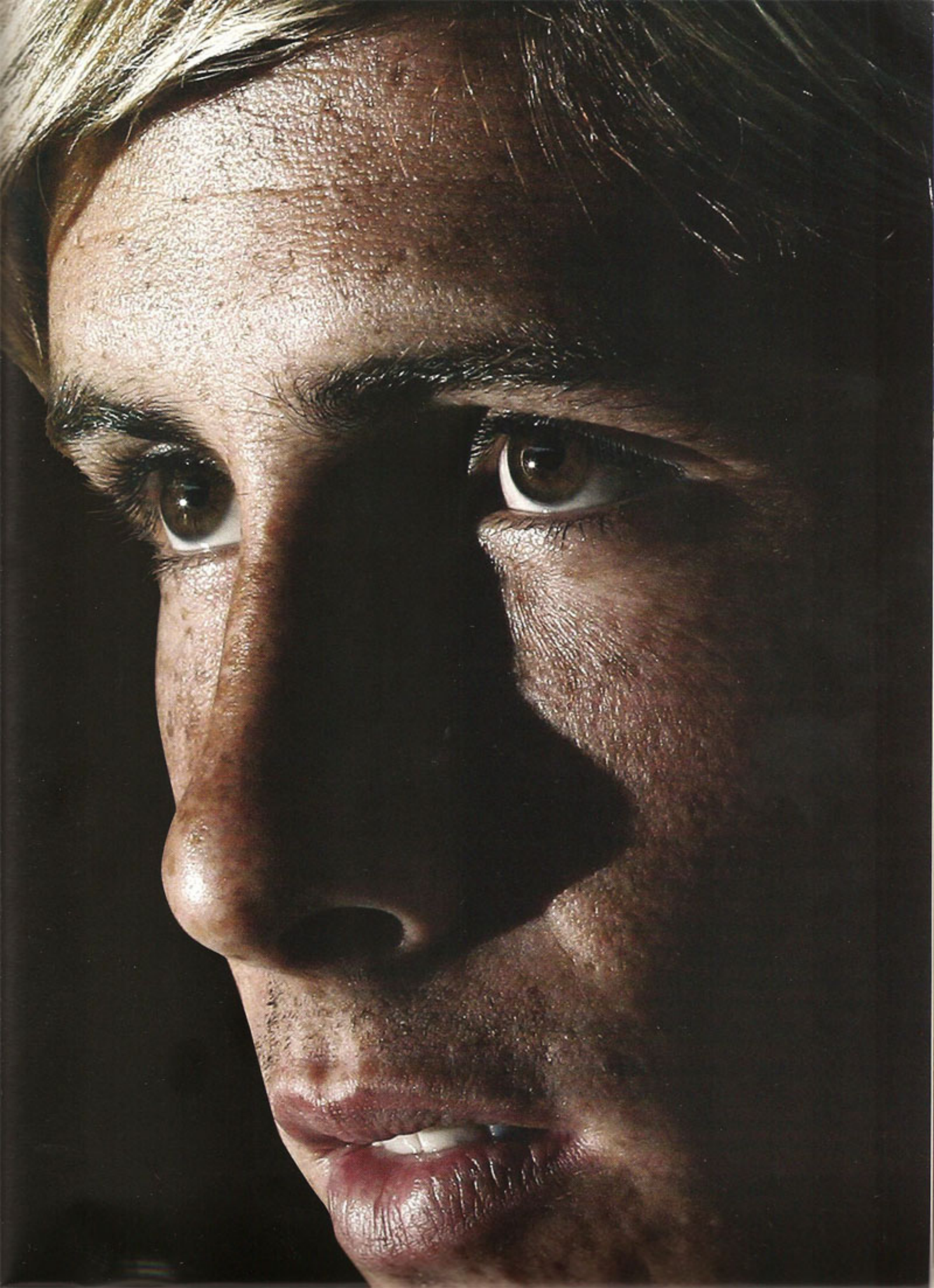
Here the Liverpool striker talks exclusively of his hopes and dreams for UEFA EURO 2008™.

Spain's reputation for underachieving at international tournaments is one which Torres and his team-mates are all too aware of and they will be hoping they can go some way to changing it with a successful campaign in Austria and Switzerland.

"It is true that Spain do not have a good record in the finals of the tournament," says Torres. "It is hard to pick out the reasons why the national team have not reached the heights that the fans, press and players expect but hopefully, we will put this right at the next European Championship."

At the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ Spain made a promising start, winning all three of their group matches, with Torres scoring four goals. Having won their group so comfortably Spain were perhaps unfortunate to come up against France, who had made a slow start to the tournament. Spain lost out to the France 3-1 in the second round but nonetheless kept faith with manager Luis Aragones. And Torres feels that with so many young players reaching maturity, it was important the set-up of the national team remained unchanged.







"I think it's been important both for continuity and confidence, it's essential to help secure a good future. Spain put in an acceptable performance at the World Cup in Germany. Of course, it's important to have continuity in the squad but it's also important to have confidence in the manager."

Following his excellent performances in Germany, not to mention his £26.5million move from Atletico Madrid to Liverpool last summer, there will be a huge weight of expectation on the 23-year-old striker's shoulders, as the Spanish supporters will look to him to score the goals to fire the team to glory. But Torres insists he won't feel under any extra pressure.

"I don't consider it a burden because football is a team sport. We obviously want to win the tournament but it will be important to take one game at a time."

Of course, Torres was an integral part of the Spanish side at the World Cup, but he also played at UEFA EURO 2004™, where Spain were less impressive. But the striker feels that the experience gained from both competitions will stand him in good stead in Austria and Switzerland. He also believes he is a better player now than he was in Germany two years ago and that his move to the Premier League has also helped him to develop.

"I am improving every year," he says. "Obviously the Premier League is a new experience for me, but when I decided to accept Liverpool's offer I knew that the style of football in the Premiership would suit the way I play. After getting to know the club I can say that it is a fantastic place to be and an ideal environment for me to progress."

The striker knows only too well that he is not the only young starlet in the Spanish team and he believes that two of his national team-mates are also benefiting from playing at the highest level of domestic and European competition.

"Andres Iniesta and Cesc Fabregas are two important players for Spain and the fact that they are playing at the highest level, at sides like Barcelona and Arsenal, will help them grow in experience, and we hope that the Spanish national team will benefit from it."

Torres and Iniesta tasted success at international level together as youngsters when they won the 2001 UEFA European Under 16 Championships in England. Even then it was obvious that Fernando was destined to go on



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to great things as he finished the tournament as the leading goalscorer and scored the winning goal in the final. Torres has fond memories of the Championship, as he reveals:

"It was my first sporting success. I managed to finish the tournament as top goalscorer and was voted UEFA Player of the Tournament as well. Afterwards, I remember feeling that I was a little closer to achieving my ambition of becoming a professional footballer."





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But despite winning the European Under 16 Championships, it is no surprise that Torres cites his 2006 World Cup experiences as his proudest moment in the Spanish shirt.

“Scoring three goals in the opening two games at the World Cup in Germany was an unforgettable experience.”

Of course, having scored four goals at the 2006 World Cup, Torres admits that like most strikers, he will have one eye on the golden boot in Austria and Switzerland.

“I am not obsessed about the golden boot but the more I score, the better it is for Spain. But as long as we are winning I won’t lose any sleep over it.”

A Spanish success in the summer would undoubtedly eclipse Fernando’s World Cup heroics of two years ago. Spain’s only UEFA European Championship title to date came in 1964, some twenty years before Torres was born. But the young striker is aware of the achievements of the 1964 team and would love to emulate them.



“I am aware of what happened in the final and I also know quite a lot about the players who played in that game, especially the players from Atletico Madrid like Rivilla and Calleja. But I was born twenty years later, so my fondest memory comes from the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

“My earliest memories of the European Championships are from EURO ’96”. I especially remember the game between Spain and the hosts, England. Spain were the better side on the day but were unlucky as we lost in the penalty shoot-out.”

Although Spain also reached the quarter-finals at UEFA EURO 2000™ they have not progressed beyond that stage since 1984, when they reached the final. And while Fernando hopes Spain can finally live up to the promise they have shown leading up to so many major tournaments, he admits it will be difficult, with a number of strong teams competing in Austria and Switzerland.

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“Personally, I would like Spain to be the ‘surprise package!’”