

France roar into finals
Sweden, Bulgaria, Czech Republic also through



AFP, Paris



OH NO! England ace Michael Owen holds his head after putting the ball across Liechtenstein's open goal at Old Trafford in Manchester on September 10.

France may have surrendered their world champions' mantle...

While France underachieved last year Germany surprised many...

The Germans' 2-1 victory over Scotland in Dortmund, however...

France's 2-0 away victory over Slovenia wrapped up their place...

The French were joined by Sweden, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic...

They could be joined in the do or die play-offs by other European heavyweights.

Spain will have to rely on the unlikely scenario of table-toppers Greece coming unstuck...

England too face a tough task after an uninspiring 2-0 home victory over Liechtenstein...

Italy are not yet through automatically after they were held to a 1-1 draw by a revitalised Serbia...

France began life after Emmanuel Petit's petulant resignation from the international scene...

opponents.

Goals from David Trezeguet, his 25th in 46 appearances...

"I rejoice in my role as the coach that we have won tonight," said Voller.

"But I haven't felt like a winner over the last few days. It has been a very difficult time which has left an indelible impression on me."

Wayne Rooney capped another demonstration of his precocious talent with his second international goal as England leapfrogged Turkey...

within a minute of the restart and Rooney, who became his country's youngest ever scorer...

"It was a professional performance," England manager Sven-Goran Eriksson said afterwards.

The Swede admitted 17-year-old Rooney's performance made it difficult to leave him out of the Turkey match...

But Liechtenstein's coach Walter Horman warned Turkey's superior creative powers will ensure the task is not easily completed.

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A home tie against Azerbaijan on October 11 is unlikely to pose Italy too many problems, but coach Giovanni Trapattoni was taking nothing for granted.

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STANDINGS table with columns for Group, Team, W, D, L, GF, GA, Pts. Includes Euro 2004 qualifying tables and remaining fixtures.

'Pele scored easy goals!'

AFP, Manaus

World Footballer of the Year Ronaldo has sparked controversy by suggesting that Pele only scored so many goals because Brazil's opponents in his era were weaker than modern-day teams.

"Brazil used to play against teams of regional level players and would win 10-0 with Pele scoring eight goals," Ronaldo said.

"Unfortunately for me, these matches against regional teams no longer exist."

Pele scored 95 goals for Brazil, while Ronaldo currently has 49.

Former teammates of Pele said Ronaldo was insulting the man widely considered the greatest player of all time.

"Ronaldo knows that there are light years between him and Pele," said former Brazil striker Dario 'Dada' Maravilha.

Ronaldo, 27, said this month he wanted to beat Pele's international goal haul.

The Real Madrid striker played but did not score in the 1-0 victory over Ecuador here on Wednesday, giving the Brazilians two wins out of two in their 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Results in Euro 2004 qualifying matches on Wednesday:

Group 1 At Antalya, Turkey Israel 2 (Revivo 16, Balili 78) Malta 2 (Mic. Mifsud 51-pen, Carabot 52) At Ljubljana Slovenia 0 France 2 (Trezeguet 10, Dacourt 71)

Group 2 At Copenhagen Denmark 2 (Tomasson 35-pen, Laursen 90) Romania 2 (Mutu 62, Pancu 72) At Luxembourg Luxembourg 0 Bosnia-Herzegovina 1 (Barbarez 36)

Group 3 At Tiraspol, Moldova Moldova 2 (Dadu 26, Covalciuc 88) Belarus 1 (Vasilyuk 90-pen) At Prague Czech Republic 3 (Koller 15-pen, Poborsky 38, Baros 90) Holland 1 (Van der Vaart 61)

Group 4 At Chorzow, Poland Poland 0 Sweden 2 (Nilsson 3, Mellberg 37) At Riga Latvia 3 (Verpakovskis 38, 51, Bleidulis 42) Hungary 1 (Lisztesz 53)

Group 5 At Tofir, Faroe Islands Faroe Islands 1 (Olsen 43) Lithuania 3 (Morinas 23, 57, Vencevicius 88) At Dortmund, Germany Germany 2 (Bobic 25, Ballack 50-pen) Scotland 1 (McCann 60)

Group 6 At Belfast Northern Ireland 0 Armenia 1 (Karamian 27) At Elche Spain 2 (Raul 59, 72) Ukraine 1 (Shevchenko 83)

Group 7 At Zilina, Slovakia Slovakia 1 (Nemeth 25) Macedonia 1 (Dimitrovski 62) At Manchester England 2 (Owen 46, Rooney 52) Liechtenstein 0

Group 8 At Andorra-La-Vella Andorra 0 Bulgaria 3 (Borbatov 11, 24, Hristov 59) At Brussels Belgium 2 (Sonck 35, 43) Croatia 1 (Simic 36)

Group 9 At Cardiff Wales 1 (Davies 3) Finland 1 (Forsell 80) At Belgrade Serbia and Montenegro 1 (Ilic 81) Italy 1 (Inzaghi 22)

Group 10 At Moscow Russia 4 (Bulykin 20, 33, 59, Mostovoi 72) Switzerland 1 (Karyaka 13-og) At Tirana Albania 3 (Hasa 51, Tare 53, Bushi 80) Georgia 1 (A. Arveladze 63)

Henin accusers back down

AFP, Brussels

Accusations levelled by Kim Clijsters' camp that US Open champion Justine Henin-Hardenne used performance enhancing drugs were retracted on Thursday.

Former French Open semi-finalist Filip De Wulf apologised unreservedly for the claims which Henin-Hardenne on Wednesday had dismissed as 'ridiculous'.

De Wulf, in an open letter to Henin-Hardenne in the Belgian media, said: "Justine, I want to apologise to you. I never wanted my comments to cast a shadow on your fantastic win in New York."

"The notion of doping never crossed my mind, rather I was referring to energy supplements like creatine to explain your spectacular muscular development."

Asia tour didn't help

AFP, Lisbon

Real Madrid coach Carlos Queiroz conceded Wednesday that the club's pre-season tour of the Far East had hurt preparations for the new season.

"The tour of Asia brought consequences that cannot be ignored," he said in an interview published in Portuguese sports daily A Bola.

"But the team has been improving, as has the yield of individual players like Michel Salgado or Luis Figo," he added.

The nine-time European champions spent three weeks in August in China, Japan and Thailand in an attempt to win over new fans.

The squad played four matches in nine days during its crowd-drawing tour, but many Real fans complained this was not the right preparation for the Spanish champions.

Abahani raided

FROM PAGE 13

in the country's history that a sports club has been raided by police accompanied by members of a rival club," said Chunnun.

"The drama involving players is a normal thing ahead of transfers. This is part and parcel of football. But last night's attack was shameful and unprecedented act against a club with a glorious past," said Abahani's chief co-ordinator Dewan Shahul Arefin Tutul.

He also termed it as a bad example and feared that it could lead to sports organisers leaving the scene because of insecurity.

"There is no place for mastans in sports. Muktiyoddha should remember that in terms of popularity they are nowhere near Abahani. This is a club supported by the majority of the people of this country. We are not afraid but we are concerned with the interference of police in club affairs," said Abahani's football manager Monem Munna.

Abahani officials also emphasised that a player is free to choose his own destiny.

"You can not force a player to play against his desire. I have also gone through the same situation during my playing career," said Munna, a former national captain and an Abahani stalwart.

Abahani has decided to take up the issue with the State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman and will also lodge a complaint to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan.

"We also want government action against the police attack," said Chunnun adding that the club directors will meet soon to decide whether to participate in the transfers or not.



Brazil's Ronaldinho (L) starts celebrating his goal against Ecuador as teammate Ronaldo approaches to congratulate at the Vivaldo Lima stadium in Manaus on September 10.

Brazil made to work



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Bolivia and Paraguay, both thrashed in their opening World Cup qualifiers at the weekend, hit back by scoring four goals each on Wednesday in an astonishing start to the marathon South American tournament.

World champions Brazil beat Ecuador by a modest 1-0 in Manaus, which lies in the heart of the Amazon rain forest, and are the only team with maximum points from two games.

Ronaldinho bundled in an early goal but it was not enough for the crowd who jeered the five-times World Cup winners.

Bolivia, hammered 5-0 by Uruguay on Sunday in a performance which their own coach Nelson Acosta described as naive, bounced back to thump Colombia 4-0 in La Paz.

Uruguay, for their part, crashed to a 4-1 defeat in Asuncion against Paraguay - who had lost their opening match by the same scoreline to Peru.

With two of the 18 rounds of matches in the marathon South American competition complete, Argentina and Chile have four points each followed by Uruguay, Peru, Paraguay, Bolivia and Ecuador with three. Colombia and Venezuela have yet to get off the mark.

Record-breaking strikers Joaquin Botero and Jose Cardozo both hit hat-tricks for Bolivia and Paraguay respectively.

Botero, who scored 49 goals for Bolivar in the Bolivian championship two years ago, helped sink Colombia in La Paz with goals in

the 28th, 49th and 58th minutes after Julio Baldivieso had opened the scoring with a 12th minute penalty.

It was a miserable evening for Colombia's Ivan Ramiro Cordoba as the Inter Milan player gave away the penalty with a handball and was sent off in the second half for hacking down Limberg Mendez.

Acosta, who had publicly mauled his players after the Montevideo debacle, hailed the victory, saying: "We have the capability and football to fight for a place (at the World Cup)."

Uruguay's eccentric coach Juan Ramon Carrasco could find himself under fire after making six changes to the team which hammered Bolivia. He dropped his entire midfield, including captain Alvaro Recoba who was the inspiration in Montevideo.

Javier Chevanton fired Uruguay ahead with rocketing long-range free kick in the 24th minute but Cardozo, who scored 36 goals in 25 games for Toluca in the Mexican championship in 2001, headed the equaliser three minutes later.

In the second half, Carlos Paredes gave Paraguay the lead and Cardozo helped himself to two more. "We were angry," said Cardozo.

Carrasco remained surprisingly upbeat. "We can learn from these slip-ups," he said. "I'm not worried about losing in this manner."

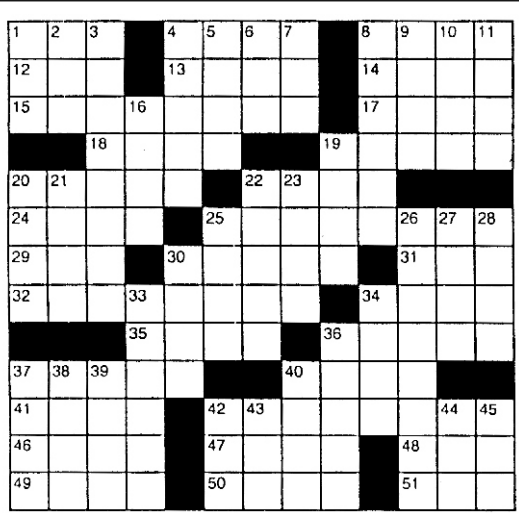
Brazil's players had bravely promised a footballing feast in Manaus but instead served up an unappetising display, with nothing to show except one scrambled goal which was awarded to Ronaldinho even though it seemed to go in off defender Neicer Reasco.

Ecuador were unlucky not to be awarded a penalty in the second half after Reasco was bundled over in the penalty area.

"The important thing was to start with two wins," said left-back Roberto Carlos. "They defended for the whole 90 minutes, that's why it wasn't a good game."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Volcanic spew 4 Put one over on the rocks 12 Agent 13 Help a hood 14 Protuberance 15 Long-popular game show 17 Wise one 18 Fork 19 "Animal House" role 20 Sloughs off 22 Field mouse 24 Telegram 25 Crucial-verbalists sine qua non 29 "The Greatest" 30 Sung soil-oques 31 Anger 32 Program 34 Enthusiastic



CRYPTOQUIP B J Z N P L G N C U P P U J Z D W Q D P B B P Q Q J Z A O W I B W J Q G W S L J A V O B C G J D P O U S Q V J O I C G Y J U O Yesterday's Cryptoquip: THE BUSY LUMBERJACK HAS MANY TASKS, AND JUST ADDED ANOTHER TO HIS CHOPPING LIST. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals L

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