



Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin is hoisted by his triumphant charges after their victory over Switzerland at Cologne on Monday.

Kiev's toast for heroes



AFP, Kiev

Ukraine toasted its hero footballers Tuesday after the team defied expectations to secure a place in the quarterfinals of their first-ever World Cup by beating Switzerland 3-0 in a penalty shootout.

"It seemed impossible but it happened. It was beyond strength but the strength was found," gushed the Sport Segodnya daily in Kiev. "We're in the quarterfinals!" screamed the headline.

"Let's call it like it is: They're heroes," one sports commentator said at the end of a match that the Ukrainians won after the game had finished locked at 0-0 after extra-time.

Thousands of Ukrainians shouting "Uuu-krai-na!" took to the streets throughout the former Soviet republic

after the game that finished in the early hours of the morning.

In the capital Kiev, fans virtually took over the center of town for hours, waving the blue and yellow national standard from honking cars and motorcycles.

In the western city of Lviv, hundreds converged on the central square singing the national anthem.

In the eastern city of Dnipropetrovsk, they celebrated until sunrise.

"This is more than a dream," exalted one fan in Kiev. "Our guys are the best!"

Ukraine -- a country that was deeply divided during the 2004 "orange revolution," where government has been in continuous turmoil since, where the economy is stagnating and another gas showdown is looming with Russia -- has been in need of some good news and its football team has provided it.

"The successful playing of the Ukrainian team works to unite Ukraine and instills patriotism," President Viktor Yushchenko said

after congratulating the team on its historic win, according to a statement from his office.

"The president thanked the players and training staff for the wonderful present that they have given their fans" ahead the 15th anniversary of Ukrainian independence in August, the statement said.

The victory over Switzerland was all the more sweet because it was largely unexpected from a team that is making its first-ever appearance at the World Cup and had a disastrous showing in its first match, losing to Spain 4-0.

"I don't think that anyone really believed in us," head coach Oleg Blokhin said in a post-match interview, according to the Interfax news agency. "Many had long ago written us off, thinking that debutants can't be competitive against experienced teams."

"Today we proved that we know how to play football. I'm in seventh heaven," he said.

Blokhin said he was too nervous to watch the penalty shoot-out after

120 minutes of tense play.

"After extra-time I went to the locker room because I couldn't stand the tension anymore," he said. "I told the guys to decide themselves who would shoot" the penalties.

In a nation where the average monthly wage is 185 dollars (147 euros) and where nationals need a visa to get into the EU, the number of fans able to travel to Germany to support the team has been few, and most have had to contend with watching the matches at home.

But the whole nation seems to have caught the football bug -- fans watch the matches on screens set up in the nation's major cities, most bars and restaurants broadcast the games and overflow with clients; lawmakers wear team jerseys to parliament and business comes to a standstill during the matches.

Following its disastrous showing in the match against Spain, Ukraine came back with a vengeance to defeat Saudi Arabia 4-0 and then eliminated Tunisia 1-0.

World Cup bridging the gaps

AFP, London

Tennis legend Boris Becker says the World Cup has made him proud to be a German and will help the country distance itself from the legacy of its Nazi past.

The winner of six Grand Slams told English newspaper The Times that as an expatriate he was enjoying visiting his homeland and had been amazed by a sport's capacity to generate goodwill.

"No politician, no political party could have planned for what has happened here, it has been natural, instinctive, the people and the country have had a joint coming out," said the 38-year-old.

"It doesn't matter who I've spoken to, they have never seen this country in a better light. Germany is back and that is so nice to say for someone who represented the country so proudly for 15 years."

Becker said the World Cup can play an important role in helping to rebuild the unfinished bridges that were burned during the last century's two world wars.

"We haven't forgotten what happened with our nation in the past and we never must," added the triple Wimbledon champion.

"We have respect for our fathers and grandfathers and what they have done for us, but it is not a part of what my generation stands for."

"We are more international than people give us credit for, more open, more friendly, and that has been shown in the opening three weeks of these World Cup finals."

An expatriate for many years, Becker admitted he often felt uncomfortable about his nationality.

"I would be sheepish in the past about being German, now I walk around Miami, where my sons and my former wife live, and in London, where I spend so much of my time, with my head held high, and that is a dramatic change," he said.

And now he hopes the World Cup fever can have a positive effect on integration in Germany.

"Recently in Germany, people of different colours and different religions haven't had it easy, but it is remarkable what sport has the power to do."

Geneva silenced

AFP, Geneva

Swiss dreams of World Cup glory turned to tears on the morning after Switzerland's second round exit from Germany in a penalty shoot-out against Ukraine.

"In the end, only tears of bitterness remain," the daily Basler Zeitung commented mournfully on Tuesday. "The Swiss World Cup dream is shattered," wrote the Tages-Anzeiger newspaper.

Instead of the expected concert of horns, cowbells and noisy street celebrations, the night passed off with an eerie silence in Geneva as fans bedecked in red and white quietly headed home.

"We cracked at the wrong moment," said the Tribune de Geneve, after three Swiss players missed their penalties in the decisive shootout at the end of a four 120 minute battle with Ukraine.

Following Switzerland's 390 minute run at the World Cup without taking a goal, the disappointment was tinged with hope for what the young squad could achieve at Euro 2008.

Switzerland will host the tournament jointly with Austria in two years time and qualify automatically.

"Let's celebrate, this team can do a lot more!" bellowed the tabloid Blick, with rose-tinted spectacles. "They have not yet reached their zenith. The future of this side as European champions in 2008 is bright and rosy."

Nesta still doubtful

AFP, Duisburg

Italy's central defender Alessandro Nesta is unlikely to be fit in time to face the Ukraine in Friday's World Cup quarterfinal in Hamburg due to his recurrent groin injury.

"It will be very difficult to have him ready," Italy team doctor Enrico Castellacci told reporters here at Italy's training camp on Tuesday.

Nesta's replacement Marco Materazzi was sent off in Monday's 1-0 second round win against Australia and is suspended for the Ukraine match.

That means Palermo's Andrea Barzagli, a second-half substitute against Australia, will come in at centre-back to play alongside Italy captain Fabio Cannavaro.

Should either Cannavaro or Barzagli get injured, Italy have no cover in that position and would probably be forced to employ midfielder Gennaro Gattuso or rightback Gianluca Zambrotta as an emergency centre-half.

Bell ringing for change



AFP, Baden-Baden

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Mohammed bin Hammam has called for an overhaul of domestic clubs and leagues to make regional sides more competitive after a poor World Cup.

Other than Australia, who were knocked out by Italy in the last 16 on Monday, none of the Asian teams made it past the first round and the football supremo described it as a big disappointment.

He said they played to their limit, but it was clear that their limit was not good enough to compete with the best in the world.

"We were hoping to have at least two teams in the second round but it didn't happen and that is disappointing," he told AFP.

"This reflects our poor domestic leagues and continental competitions. We have to make drastic changes to help Asian football progress and become professional."

There were high hopes for South Korea and Asian champions Japan after the two countries co-hosted the 2002 World Cup and surprised every-

one when South Korea made the semi-finals and Japan the round of 16.

But they failed to live up to expectations in Germany and along with Saudi Arabia and Iran were turfed out of the competition before the knock-outs.

It left AFC newcomer Australia to carry Asian hopes and they were cruelly dumped on Monday after 10-man Italy scored a last minute penalty.

Before the tournament began, bin Hammam told AFP Asian football's reputation and credibility would be on the line in Germany and he admits the failure to get teams past the first round could have repercussions.

At present, four AFC teams automatically qualify for the World Cup but the regional body has been hoping to convince FIFA that it should have five.

"What has happened cannot help in the push for more Asian places," he said.

While Asian football confederations were doing their best, bin Hammam said a lack of professionalism among Asian domestic clubs and leagues was hindering the development of football.

"It is my belief that this defeat is because of poor competition structures, particularly club competi-

tions, both at national and confederation level," he said.

"We will not see any improvement at the international standard unless we restructure and improve the professionalism in our clubs and in our leagues."

"We need to professionalise all aspects of the game, including administration and management, to really create professional leagues comparative with those outside Asia."

"As president of AFC, this is my focus for our next stage of development. We can achieve this, and this should be Asia's future objective."

Previously he has pointed to the English Premier League as the model for Asian nations to follow, and said Australia's success was because most of its players played their trade in professional leagues in Europe.

"In my mind, a key contributor to your success is that most of their team plays in very strong leagues," he said of a country that only joined the AFC this year, defecting from Oceania to give it a better chance to qualify for the World Cup.

"They are well prepared for the high standards at the World Cup. We need to build strong leagues in Asia so that our national teams have the same experience to bring to the field in such important competitions."

Not winning friends, but ...



AFP, Kaiserslautern

Italy may not be winning many friends for their dogged World Cup performances, but who cares when you're in the quarterfinals?

"Conta solo vincere" (only winning counts) has been the Italian players' mantra since their arrival in Germany, and Monday's 1-0 second round victory over Australia confirmed their new philosophy.

"We're not pretty to watch, but we are a tough team and difficult to score against," said midfielder Gennaro Gattuso after Francesco Totti's penalty in the fifth minute of stoppage time ended the Aussie's World Cup adventure.

Defender Gianluca Zambrotta insisted it wasn't easy to win with style at the World Cup with so much at stake.

"We are not robots and it's not easy to play well all the time," he said.

"But we fight to the last minute and we hope this desire can take us

all the way."

Italy have been criticised for not showing the kind of flair with which Azzurri teams of the past used to excite and enthrall, but their defence is solid as a rock.

The Azzurri backline has conceded just one goal in four matches, an own goal at that.

In fairness to the Italians, they were unable to be too attack-minded against Australia following the dismissal of Marco Materazzi in the 50th minute for a crunching tackle on Marco Bresciano.

The referee judged that Bresciano was denied a goal-scoring opportunity and Materazzi was shown a straight red card, Italy's second sending-off in the competition.

Along with midfielder Daniele de Rossi, Materazzi will be suspended for the quarterfinal against the Ukraine in Hamburg on Friday.

Striker Alberto Gilardino hailed the Italian defence for standing firm when Materazzi walked.

"Playing with 10 men for most of the second half was tough, but I thought we rarely looked in trouble even with a man less," he said.

"The defence was superb and didn't give anything away."

Gilardino believes Italy's lack of width is making them too predictable.

"We need to open up the game down the flanks rather than going through the middle all the time," he said.

Italy coach Marcello Lippi insisted his team fully deserved to beat the Aussies despite another unconvincing performance which suggests they will struggle to go much further in the tournament.

"I definitely wouldn't say we were lucky," said the 58-year-old after Italy had extended their unbeaten run to 22 internationals.

"We were very well organised at the back. We showed tremendous heart and great character."

Australia coach Gus Hiddink, who masterminded South Korea's shock second round win over Italy at the 2002 World Cup, was proud of his players for pushing the Azzurri all the way.

"We played well and we can be happy with our performance," said the Dutchman.

"When we had an extra man, we played some good football without scoring, but if you don't score, you don't win."

Socceroos for the right man



AFP, Kaiserslautern

Australia's heartbroken players say it's imperative for a big-name international coach to carry on Gus Hiddink's football revolution.

The Australians head home from Germany shaking their heads over a disputed injury-time penalty that killed off their World Cup hopes in a cruel 1-0 loss to three-time champions Italy here Monday.

Substitute Francesco Totti converted the penalty with the last kick of the game to send a 10-man Italy through to a quarterfinal with Ukraine in Hamburg on Friday.

The spot-kick decision by Spanish referee Luis Medina Cantalejo appeared dubious with Italy's Fabio Grosso appearing to slip over in the box before he came into contact with defender Lucas Neill.

Hiddink, who has had a profound effect on the Australian team getting them to the last 16 in only their sec-

ond finals' appearance in 32 years, finishes up with the Socceroos to become the new Russian team boss.

Australia's players have urged Football Federation Australia officials to pursue a leading international coach to carry on the momentum from an exhilarating World Cup campaign which immersed a nation and gained world-wide football respect.

Italian-based midfielder Vince Grella, one of Australia's stars of the tournament, said it was vital to get the right man.

"From the little feedback we're getting the federation understands how important a big coach is for us," he said.

"Obviously, big coaches mean big money but if we want to build the team we have to start the next time we come together, our plan should be straight away for the next World Cup preparation and take on the positives and some things we could do better."

Hiddink, who instilled an unshakable self-belief and playing system into the Australian team, would be a tough act to replace, Tim Cahill said.

"It's going to be very difficult

because the new coach has got a big pair of shoes to fill," the Everton midfielder said.

"Gus has been magical. He's been unbelievable, he's been the best manager I've ever worked under as a footballer and the most inspirational one."

"But whoever comes in it doesn't matter because all the foundations are there."

"We have to keep building and look for the youngsters to come through and there's a few old boys in our team and they'll be around for a year or so, but for the next World Cup we need to start building through the (2007) Asian Cup to progress."

Midfielder Jason Culina, one who has greatly benefited by the Hiddink makeover, said it was important to maintain the same playing style introduced by the master Dutch coach.

"We have to keep the style of play he's introduced to the Australian team, no matter who comes in, whether it's a French or an English coach," he said.

Captain Mark Viduka, who turns 31 in October and is considering his international future, echoed his

teammates' call.

"Hopefully, we can get a good coach to lead us and it's very important to keep the momentum going so our sport can get the same recognition as the other sports back home," the Middlesbrough striker said.

Hiddink, the orchestrator of Australia's magical ride over the last few heavy weeks at the World Cup, said the 2008 Beijing Olympics must be a major building block for the reshaped Australian team, facing a number of retirements over the next 12-18 months.

"You have to make the analysis from this World Cup and also look ahead to the future and look at the players and what ages they are," Hiddink said.

"Maybe we have to step back a bit and start building not a totally new team, but consider whether some of the players will be there at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa."

"In the coming years the FFA have to consider that and talk to the players and if they still want to have a new era, then they can't wait for six months or a year."

"They must make a new project through to 2010, through the Olympic Games in 2008."



Australian midfielder Tim Cahill (R) tries a spectacular scissor-kick in vain as Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon looks on during their round of 16 match at Kaiserslautern's Fritz-Walter Stadium on Monday.



Swiss goalkeeper Pascal Zuberbuehler (2nd R) is comforted by his teammates after their loss to Ukraine at the Cologne stadium on Monday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS
- TV alien
 - Grouch
 - Symbol of 41-Down
 - Rocky
 - Old Italian bread
 - Andy's pal
 - Lennon's lady
 - Ellipse
 - Pop
 - Frank
 - recipe
 - Either T in AT&T
 - Chio no
 - Details
 - Moo goo gai pan
 - pan
 - Turn on the water-works
 - Milne
 - bruin
 - Crib
 - Diner's card
 - Longing
 - Choke
 - The EWings' home
 - Pack away
- DOWN
- Pruritus
 - Diving bird
 - Anderson
 - Potential prince?
 - They may be beside themselves
 - Compellor
 - Spedy's steed
 - Increase rapidly
 - Lacks
 - Beyond control
 - Took the train
 - 11th-grade exam
 - Still
 - Spotted
 - 20 Diving bird
 - 23 Agent
 - 24 "Lialume" writer
 - 25 A very long time
 - 26 Alopecia concealer
 - 27 West-helmer topic
 - 28 — roll
 - 29 Clear the tables
 - 31 Soaking spot
 - 32 Media mogul
 - 34 Roscoe
 - 35 Cave dwellers of folklore
 - 36 Thames county
 - 37 Brilliance
 - 38 Fair share, maybe
 - 39 Evangelist
 - 40 Pool occupant?
 - 41 Green acres
 - 42 Vortex
 - 43 Libertine
 - 44 Faxed

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CRYPTOQUIP

PGP RAI PMGUU EIUU RAJR
 OCCFIRAGDH KJO FGOOGDH
 EMCF GRO UGEI? KIUU
 FJQNI J UGRRI NGR
 Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF A FROG IS FEELING PARTICULARLY FROLICSBOME, I SUPPOSE IT MIGHT GO ON A HOPPING SPREE.
 Today's Cryptquip Clue: P equals D

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.