

Les Bleus avenge Berlin debacle

AFP, Paris



Wantaway Lyon striker Sidney Govou helped France forget their World Cup final defeat with a brace in an exciting 3-1 defeat of Italy at the Stade de France on Wednesday.

France's defeat to Italy this summer left huge wounds and, despite claims to the contrary, it appeared Raymond Domenech's men were desperate to make a special effort in maintaining their perfect start to the Euro 2008 qualifiers.

For Italy, though, under new coach Roberto Donadoni it leaves them with just one point after two matches having drawn 1-1 at home to Lithuania on Saturday.

Donadoni admitted that his players, who will only restart the Italian league championship this weekend, were still looking for form. "It was difficult out there. France had the home advantage, and maybe we were guilty of lapses in concentration," said Donadoni, who added they remained optimistic despite their points difference.

"We're five points behind France in the standings, but we still have a chance to come back. The qualifiers are not yet over, so we have to stay optimistic." After only two minutes Govou, who hasn't played a game for the French champions this season, opened the scoring with a beautifully-struck first-timer which looked as if one French player was offside.

Thierry Henry scored France's second goal on the 17th minute, only for Italian Alberto Gilardino to head home two minutes later.

Govou's second of the match in the 54th minute settled the score for the former world champions who now have two wins from two games following their 3-0 win over Georgia.

However Domenech, their hard-to-please coach, said it was far from perfect.

"It wasn't perfect, and I hope there will be better performances from us," he said.

"At certain times in the match we left ourselves exposed and were susceptible to danger.

"But overall I felt we were calm, and above all sure of ourselves. Everyone is feeling good and technically we were superior.

With three goals inside the first 20 minutes, this was certainly no World Cup final.

France played with discipline and abandon while Italy, who have yet to restart their Serie A league championship, often seemed a step behind their hosts.

The first half, despite an effort from Gianluca Zambrotta which shaved Gregory Coupet's crossbar early on and a shot from Franco Semoli which had Coupet scrambling, was all about France.

On the quarter hour a Patrick Vieira cross from midfield found Thierry Henry deep on the left, but the Arsenal striker stumbled against the Italy defence.

Minutes later a speculative shot from Florent Malouda was saved by Buffon, however the big keeper's rebound fell to Henry.

From an impossible angle Henry struck for goal, and his shot took a deflection off Fabio Cannavaro before finding the net.

Almost immediately Italy reduced arrears, and did so in style. An Andrea Pirlo free-kick from the right wing caused all sorts of confusion among the French defence and as they raced back to defend AC Milan striker Gilardino escaped the attentions of Govou and placed the easiest of headers past Coupet.

France continually looked the most dangerous of the two sides, however Italy were not to be discounted especially on the counter attack.

Coupet had to look lively in the 28th minute when Semoli appeared from nowhere to meet a Pirlo cross which had been dummed by Gilardino.

France began the second half in just a determined fashion as they had the first.

Only two minutes in, a claim for a penalty by Govou was correctly waved away after Cannavaro appeared to bring him down in the box.

Less than 10 minutes later claimed his second of the match, rising to meet Willy Sagnol's cross and head past the beaten Buffon.

A clash of heads with Cannavaro left the Italy captain complaining, and obviously feeling the pain.

Towards the hour mark Gilardino was shown a yellow card for simulating a penalty after the slightest of touches by Coupet.

Five minutes later some nice

SEE PAGE 22 COL 4



French midfielder Sidney Govou (R) celebrates his second goal against Italy with teammates Thierry Henry (L) and midfielder Florent Malouda during their Euro 2008 qualifying match at the Stade de France in Paris on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Owen surgery goes 'extremely well'

Football

AFP, Newcastle

A second operation to repair Newcastle and England striker Michael Owen's cruciate knee ligament has gone "extremely well".

Owen travelled to the United States for the second time this summer to undergo the second part of two-stage surgery undertaken by specialist Dr Richard Steadman.

The 26-year-old ruptured his anterior cruciate knee ligament during the 2-2 draw with Sweden in the World Cup in June and there have been fears he will miss the

entire Premiership season. However, Owen can now begin his rehabilitation after Dr Steadman operated as the forward responded well to previous treatment.

Newcastle manager Glenn Roeder was thrilled by the news of Owen's progress.

"I've spoken to our club doctor Roddy MacDonald across in Colorado and he gave me the fantastic news that Michael's operation went extremely well," Roeder told the club's official website.

"As far as Michael is concerned, he can now start to focus on playing again.

"It's going to be a long haul but he can start to focus on that. And I look

forward to the day when I can write his name on a Newcastle United team sheet."

Owen will make an immediate start to his intensive rehabilitation programme in the United States and will return to Newcastle in due course later next week.

Owen's career at Newcastle has been dogged by injury, making just 10 starts for the Magpies - although he scored seven goals in that time - after breaking his metatarsal at the turn of the year.

The injury ruled him out until the end of April and he travelled to Germany for the World Cup finals clearly not match fit.

Eng-Pak 4th ODI today

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan will be hoping to clinch the series as they face England in the fourth one-day international at Trent Bridge in Nottingham today.

Inzamam-ul-Haq's men are leading the series 2-0 after their two-wicket win in the third match of the series at the Rose Bowl in Southampton on Tuesday. Batsman Younis Khan starred for Pakistan as he scored 101, his second one-day international ton but the tourists suffered a late-order collapse.

Skipper Inzamam was left with tail-ender Shoaib Akhtar to finish the match.

Earlier, Pakistan won the second match by seven wickets at Lord's following the washed out match in Cardiff on August 30.

Brazilian booter's sister kidnapped

AFP, Sao Paulo

The sister of Brazilian footballer Michael Anderson da Silva, was seized by unknown gunmen on Wednesday in Sao Paulo, according to Globo News television channel.

The 23-year-old Palmeiras player was allowed to leave training at his club after hearing the news.

Police said Celia was kidnapped as she arrived at work. Kidnappings such as these are not uncommon in Brazil where the mothers of footballers are usually the targets. Five players' mothers were seized in 2004 and 2005.

Although the gangs that snatch them tend to be armed, the family members are always returned alive and well, although sometimes after a ransom is paid.

One of the most infamous incidents was that of Real Madrid forward Robinho, just after he signed for the Spanish giants from Sao Paulo team Santos in 2004.

His mother was held for 41 days before he stumped up around 55,000 euros (70,300 dollars) to free her. He was just 20 at the time.

The latest widely publicised incident was at the end of June when Marcos Borges, who plays for Amminia Bielefeld in Germany, admitted to having paid a 10,000 euro (12,700 dollars) ransom and handed over his watch to free his wife Luciane, who had been held for a week in Brazil.

Lama threatens to quit Kenya

REUTERS, Nairobi

Former French goalkeeper Bernard Lama has threatened to quit as Kenya's national coach just weeks after taking up the post, officials said on Thursday.

Lama, a member of France's 1998 World Cup-winning squad, is annoyed that he has yet to receive a

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

Media slam awful Azzurri

AFP, Rome



The Italian press on Thursday tore into the world champions after their 3-1 defeat to France in a European championship qualifier in Paris.

France's win on Wednesday went some way to avenging their defeat to Italy in the World Cup final in July and dented the Azzurri's hopes of qualifying for the 2008 tournament in Austria and Switzerland.

Italy were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly Lithuania last Saturday and are already five points adrift of Group B rivals France and

Scotland.

"The party's over," headlined La Gazzetta dello Sport.

"Revenge for France after Berlin and now Italy are in trouble.

"France give us three slaps and fly towards one of the two qualification places for the next European championships," it said.

"And even if nobody can take the World Cup away from us, which we wrestled from France two months ago, yesterday's terrible performance will remain in the memory and more importantly leaves us with us with worries in the group.

"In two matches, (Italy captain) Fabio Cannavaro and his teammates have secured a modest draw against little Lithuania before this inexcusable defeat, transforming all

the exclamation marks that accompanied the team's return from Germany into question marks."

The Corriere dello Sport was equally scathing.

"Give us our Italy back," it headlined before tearing further into the team whose starting line-up included seven of those who began the final against France in Germany.

"The rematch finishes badly. The Azzurri are unrecognisable and France dominate.

"They were quicker, more aggressive, more courageous and better at keeping possession. They almost inoculated us."

Van Persie stars in Dutch win

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Dutch coach Marco van Basten emphasised the importance of Robin van Persie to the team after his two goals set up a 3-0 win over Belarus in Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier.

Van Persie struggled for half an hour and got into a discussion with English referee Howard Webb when he was booked for a foul on Maxim Romashchenko, but then turned the tide and became the most dangerous player in the Dutch side.

"I told him to control his emotions," Van Basten said.

"He received a booking for a foul caused by frustration and kept arguing.

"I told him that he is too important to the team and that he has to think about that."

The coach's words seemed to work as Van Persie scored the first two goals and then set up Dirk Kuyt in the final minute for a third.

"I try to be important for my team" the winger told reporters. "I have to earn my team mates confidence by scoring goals, providing assists and performing my defensive duties."

"The first goal was a difficult attempt but it came at the right moment as well for me as the team."

"In the opening phase it didn't work out like I wanted but I fought back in the match," the Arsenal player added.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5

Nadal knocked out

AFP, New York



World number two Rafael Nadal crashed out of the US Open on Wednesday losing to unseeded Mikhail Youzhny who has made a habit of ousting Spanish top seeds at the 18.5 million dollar event.

The Russian defeated the two-time French Open champion and Wimbledon finalist Nadal 6-3, 5-7, 7-6, 6-1 in a quarterfinal match.

"He did the little things better," Nadal said. "I was not playing with my best calm on the important points. Mentally I need a little more confidence."

Youzhny will play American Andy Roddick who fired off 17 aces en route to a 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 victory over Leyton Hewitt of Australia for a place in the final.

A bruising encounter between Nadal and Youzhny turned on the third set tie-break which the world 54th ranked Youzhny won 7/5 after a series of gruelling rallies.

Playing inspired tennis Youzhny ran away into a 5-0 lead in the fourth set leaving Nadal shaking his head in disbelief and with a mountain to climb.

The 20-year-old Spaniard managed to win one game and had a break point in the next, but Youzhny held firm and he converted his first match point when Nadal hit a forehand inches wide.

"It was a very tough match. I can't believe I beat Rafa in four sets," the 24-year-old Muscovite said.

"When we started all the crowd was for Rafa because he was the favourite, but I hope I have managed to change their opinion," he said.

Youzhny was facing his third-straight Spaniard in New York. He upset sixth seed Tommy Robredo 6-2, 6-0, 6-1 in the round of 16 and 11th seed David Ferrer 4-6, 6-4, 7-5, 6-4 in the third round.



PHOTO: AFP

CAN'T BE HAPPENING: Rafael Nadal of Spain frowns as he misses a point against Mikhail Youzhny of Russia in the quarterfinal of the US Open at Flushing Meadows on Wednesday.

Germany 13: San Marino 0

AFP, Serravalle



World Cup semifinalists Germany made San Marino look every bit the 191st best team in the world with a shuddering 13-0 demolition here on Wednesday in a Euro 2008 group D qualifier.

In so doing, Germany recorded their biggest ever victory away from home in their 106-year history of international matches.

Coach Joachim Loew was beaming afterwards. "The team handled themselves

very well, with a lot of professionalism, never losing rhythm and being clinical in front of goal.

"We scored some great goals and now we have a good base for the next matches."

Bayern Munich forward Lukas Podolski, who was named young player of the tournament at the World Cup, was like a kid in a candy shop and he blasted four goals.

While undoubtedly putting a gloss on his already impressive scoring record at international level, that feat will also raise his considerable stock even further.

Werder Bremen forward Miroslav Klose had a relatively frugal day compared to his strike-partner,

bagging just two goals but took his overall total to 33 goals in 65 matches although still some way off the all-time leading German scorer Gerd Muller, who rattled up 68.

Thomas Hitzelsperger, with two, and Manuel Friedrich scored their first goals for the national side while Chelsea's Michael Ballack, Bernd Schneider, with a late penalty, and Bastian Schweinsteiger (two) also got their names on the scoresheet.

And having won their opening match against Ireland as well, Germany are sitting very pretty at the top of group D with six points from two games and a goal difference of +14.



PHOTO: AFP

Bastian Schweinsteiger of Germany (L) takes the ball away from San Marino's Marco Domeniconi during their Euro 2008 qualifying match in Serravalle on Wednesday.

Bosnia coach resigns

AFP, Sarajevo

Bosnian football coach Blaz Sliškovic has resigned following his team's defeat to Hungary, Sarajevo dailies reported Thursday.

"I have decided to resign... for moral reasons," Oslobodjenje quoted Sliškovic as saying following Wednesday's 3-1 loss to Hungary in a Euro 2008 Group C qualifier.

"I did it now at the start of the qualifying period in order to leave enough time for my successor to do something with this team," said Sliškovic, who was named national team boss in January 2002.

He ended his 20-year-long career as a player in 1998 after spells with Bosnian side Velez Mostar, Hajduk Split of Croatia, Marseille in France and Pescara in Italy.

The 47-year-old also played 26 matches with the national team of the former Yugoslavia, before the federation broke up in 1991.

Since the end of Bosnia's 1992-95 war, the country's national football team has failed to qualify for either the World Cup or the European Championships.