

DANTE'S TEARS OF JOY AFTER SAN MARINO MAKE HISTORIC STRIDE

There were emotional scenes yesterday as San Marino avoided defeat in back-to-back competitive game for the first time in their history. The minnows, with their dentists, accountants and bankers in the starting XI, have been the whipping boys of international football for years now, losing 147 out of their first 150 games. But now they have had consecutive UEFA Nations League matches, drawing against Liechtenstein and Gibraltar. The result at home yesterday was made even more impressive given San Marino had captain Davide Simoncini sent off four minutes into the second half. Consecutive clean sheets meant so much to the players, with centre-back Dante Rossi overcome with emotion when giving a post-match interview. "For me it's a dream ... I can't speak," he explained as his voice began to crack. He brought a hand to his face as he tried to hold back tears, but was overwhelmed. "I beg your pardon ... I'm very excited," he added, dedicating the success to his family, team staff and the country "which is small but satisfied for now." -- Agencies



For all the attacking talent on the pitch during Saturday's crunch Nations League encounter between Portugal and France, it was the defence-minded N'Golo Kanté who put in a man-of-the-match performance and got the decisive goal to boot, knocking Cristiano Ronaldo (Inset) and Portugal out of contention for the tournament's final four.

PHOTO: UEFA/TWITTER

Solid France dethrone uninspired Portugal

AGENCIES, Lisbon



France handed defending Nations League champions Portugal a rare defeat on Saturday, winning 1-0 in Lisbon with N'Golo Kanté's second-half strike to reach the competition's final four at the expense of the holders.

Anthony Martial missed three clear-cut first half chances for France before Kanté scored only his second international goal in the 54th minute, and his first since 2016, to end Portugal's run of five successive clean sheets.

World champions France went top of Group A3 with 13 points from five games, three ahead of Portugal and with the better head-to-head record to give them an unassailable lead. It was only Portugal's second defeat since the 2018 World Cup.

"Given the quality of the opposition, it's of course one of our best performances of recent times," France coach Didier Deschamps said of Portugal, who are the European champions. "We deserved the win and we've fulfilled our objective of finishing top. I'm very proud of the players. They proved tonight that France are still a great team."

Rui Patrício took centre stage in the first half, saving superbly on two occasions from Anthony Martial. When the Manchester United striker did find a way past him, with

a close-range header, the crossbar came to the Portugal No. 1's rescue.

France finally broke through just as Portugal appeared to be imposing themselves. Griezmann slipped another ball through to Rabiot whose shot was parried by Patrício and Kanté was on hand to score from the rebound.

Portugal had three chances go begging in the same attack, including a José Fonte header against the post, and Lloris made a one-handed save to parry a raking drive from João Moutinho, who then saw his cross evade three forwards as France held out.

"I don't know what went wrong in the first half, it wasn't what I expected but it was my responsibility," said Portugal coach Fernando Santos. "We were better in the second half but then conceded the goal which settled the game... we had three or four chances to equalise."

France legend Jean Pierre Papin was full of praise for the display, noting that it was indeed the midfield that had paved the way for this success.

"I like this environment with Rabiot, Kanté and Pogba. Pogba was effective in transition and gave a hand behind. Rabiot, higher up, was very good on the left and Kanté even more so. He was in front, behind, he scored the goal. He is the cornerstone of this team. But today, I saw a team, not a sum of talents."

'Day's absence won't impact us'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Covid-19 positive case of Jamie Day may come as a big shock to the Bangladesh football team, but the players do not want to dwell on this issue as they prepare for tomorrow's second and final FIFA international friendly against Nepal.

Assistant coach Stuart Watkiss conducted the training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday in absence of the head coach, who underwent a second test yesterday after testing positive on Saturday.

"I think Jamie's presence is very important for us because of the way he works with us. He has been helping us a lot from the beginning of the pandemic. We suddenly heard that he is Covid-19 positive and we really felt bad not seeing him around in training today," striker Mahbubur Rahman Sufil said after nearly two-hours' training at the BNS.

"I think his absence won't affect us. I hope he will work with us tomorrow (Monday) before the match," Sufil added.

Winger Saad Uddin, too, believes, Day's absence will not have an impact on the team. "The players are mentally strong and assistant coach Watkiss is communicating with Jamie and taking care of things in training," Saad said.

During training, Watkiss focused on areas where the players made mistakes in the first match. The forwards went through shooting practice from inside the box, with another player coming up as a back-up to tap in the rebounds in case the goalkeepers parried those efforts back. The booters also delivered crosses from the flanks and long passes from the midfield for the forwards to finish off the moves.

"We had passing practice because our passing in midfield was not good in the first match. The coach also discussed the matter in the meeting and showed the way we can improve the standard of passing in midfield and also asked us to increase our confidence. The assistant coach applied those things in practice today.

Staying out of action for a long time was one of the reasons for the miss-passes while there was also lack of understanding among the players due to the long lay-off," said Saad, who believes Nepal will come strongly in the second match.

"Nepal-Bangladesh matches have always been tough ones and these are 50-50 affairs. The fitness of Nepalese players was not bad as they played well in the second half. I think the next match will be more competitive because they have also prepared themselves better after the first match. I think the next match will be more exciting and interesting," said Saad, who

provided the cross for Nabib Newaz Jibon to score the first goal.

Sufil also praised the way the forwards trained yesterday.

"Having shots on target with a player as back-up is really important because one must go forward to latch on to the rebounds. We lacked in this area in the first match and could not implement these things properly on the ground, which was the premise of the training today," said Sufil, who sealed off the victory in the first match with an eye-catching goal ten minutes from time.



Despite the absence of head coach Jamie Day after he contracted Covid-19, the Bangladesh national team were in a jovial mood overall as evidenced by Mahbubur Rahman Sufil's smile. The team were training for their second international friendly against Nepal after winning the first match 2-0.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



HISTORY-MAKER

Sergio Ramos became the most capped European player of all time when he made his 177th appearance for Spain in their Nations League clash against Switzerland. However, although it was one of the most significant games of his career, it was also among the more forgettable. The 34-year-old made another piece of history when, after scoring 25 consecutive penalties, he saw two penalties saved on the night. It was the first time in Spain's history that the team missed two penalties in the same match.



I don't remember what I told Ramos before the second penalty. Sergio's numbers are available. If there had been more penalties, three or four, he would have continued taking them. He had 25 in a row! These things happen in football.

Luis Enrique

Hamilton equals Schumacher

AFP, ISTANBUL

Lewis Hamilton secured a record-equalling seventh Formula One world title on Sunday after winning the Turkish Grand Prix despite starting sixth on the grid.

The Briton matched Michael Schumacher's haul of drivers' crowns with three races of the season remaining. The 35-year-old sealed his latest title with a typically measured masterclass, handling treacherous wet early conditions to claim his 94th career win despite his unaccustomed start position.

A breathless Hamilton said: "I'm lost for words. This is way beyond my dreams."

Hamilton, who sealed his first title in 2008, was adding to his unprecedented roster of records -- most wins with 94, most pole positions (97), most podium finishes (163) and most consecutive points finishes (47).

As he received the congratulations of his team, Hamilton was almost overcome with emotion in the car after the race, saying: "To all the kids out there, dream the impossible." "I feel like I'm only just getting started, it's really weird."



Shakib Al Hasan has been in the news for all the wrong reasons since returning to the country upon the completion of his one-year-ban from cricket on November 6, but cricket is finally back on his agenda. The top ODI all-rounder was spotted at the home of cricket in Mirpur yesterday, spending time in the nets for the first time since his ban. The left-hander batted at the outer nets of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium and also worked on his bowling under the supervision of his mentor Mohammad Salahuddin. Shakib will be making his return to cricket through the upcoming Bangabandhu T20 Cup, where he will represent Gemcon Khulna.

PHOTO: STAR

FIRST ROUND: MATCH 7

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