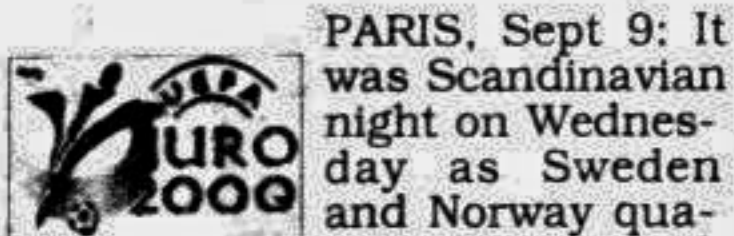


Denmark jolt Italy

Scandinavians party



PARIS, Sept 9: It was Scandinavian night on Wednesday as Sweden and Norway qualified for the 2000 European Championship Finals while Denmark's 3-2 victory in Italy in Group 1 was the shock of the day, reports AFP.

Spain also qualified while Germany took a giant stride towards next year's tournament in Holland and Belgium. Italy should still go through despite their unexpected setback.

Romania, who drew 1-1 with Portugal in Bucharest, are guaranteed to progress either as Group Seven winners, which looks likely as they are away to Liechtenstein in their final match, or as the best runners-up.

However, England, who were held to a goalless draw in Poland, now need Sweden to beat the Poles while world champions France have their work cut out going into their final match in third place in their pool.

The performance of the night was undoubtedly Denmark's. Goals from Diego Fuser and Christian Vieri gave Italy a 2-0 lead at Naples but then a Martin Jorgensen penalty reduced the arrears at the interval.

Celtic star Morten Wieghorst squared the match between Italian defender Christian Panucci turned the ball into his own net under pressure from Jon Dahl Tomasson to clinch the victory for Denmark.

Dino Zoff's Italy had only needed a draw to seal qualification but now need to avoid similar embarrassment in Belarus. Switzerland stayed in the hunt as two goals from Kubilay Turkulmaz were enough for a 2-0 win over Belarus.

Sheffield Wednesday star Nicolas Alexandersson's goal against Luxembourg was enough to ensure Sweden top Group Five.

And Poland's 0-0 draw with England at Warsaw means the Poles are looking good for the runners-up spot, needing just a point against Sweden in their remaining match.

England's cause was not helped by the dismissal for a two-footed tackle of David Batty although they had what looked like a legitimate penalty appeal turned down when Paul Scholes tumbled in the box.

England coach Kevin Keegan said: "The only good thing for us is that Sweden are a good side and will give the Poles a real fight next month."

If we have to qualify through the back door so be it... if we don't then we'll just have to get over it and look to the future."

Sweden coach Tommy Soderberg, meanwhile, assured England that his team would go "flat out" to beat Poland.

"We don't think much about England or Poland. We concentrate exclusively on our own performance," Soderberg told the London Evening Standard.

"We try never to speak in terms of winning or drawing but we go out and play as well as we can every time."

"We will be doing that against Poland. I can assure you we will be going flat out."

"We have a professional and a national pride and it is our intention to play as well as we can every time."

Unbeaten Sweden have won six of their seven games so far, dropping points only in the 0-0 draw against England at Wembley in June.

Norway too are home and dry in Group Two after a 4-0 spanking of Slovenia at Oslo. However, the Slovenes console themselves with the knowledge they have secured the play-off spot after Latvia and Georgia's 2-2 draw.

An early own goal from Slovenia's Rudi Istencic put the home side in charge and English Premiership stars Steven Iversen, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and Oyvind Leonhardsen wrapped up the points.

In Group Three Germany have been pilloried for a poor sequence of friendly results but only a Turkish victory on German soil in the last match can now deny them the automatic berth.

Over Bierhoff scored his 27th goal in a German shirt before Middlesbrough's Christian Ziege scored a hat-trick to sink dismal Northern Ireland 4-0.

But the Turks had to settle for a 1-1 draw in Moldova.

For the Germans, the 4-0 drubbing ended a gruelling week. Already on Saturday they conceded three goals against Turkey at Windsor Park in Belfast and can now finally go home and look toward their next challenge, qualifying for the 2002 World Cup.

Germany played some of their best football in months, albeit against poor opposition.

The Northern Irish were overwhelmed, failing to place a single shot in anger on the Germans goal.

The pre-match prophecy of their coach Lawrie McNamey - "to beat us you've only got to score once because we never score" - was fulfilled in the third minute when Bierhoff pounced on a Mehmet Scholl freekick which had struck the post.

Ziege centred the loose ball to Bierhoff and emerged as man of the match by scoring Germany's next three goals before half time.

The first began in the centre circle when veteran libero Lothar Matthaus made a perfect pass 40 metres to Oliver Neuville in the 16th minute.

The stylish winger tempted Northern Ireland's German-born keeper Malik Taylor off his line and then whipped the ball to Ziege who was waiting expectantly in the middle.



German Mehmet Scholl (R) fights for the ball with Northern Ireland's Ian Nolan in their Euro 2000 qualifier. — AFP photo

"Oli set it up so well for me there wasn't really much I had to do. It had to go in," Ziege smiled.

In the 33rd minute Ziege cut the Northern Irish defence apart after a lovely one-two with Bierhoff, and then on the tick of half time his hat-trick was complete.

Scholl danced by a flat footed Northern Irish defender and slipped the ball through to Ziege who whipped it into the net.

"In Finland on Saturday we didn't score in the second half, as was the case here, but the difference was that we played better football," Germany coach Erich Ribbeck said.

"We kept pushing after the break, we worked the wings, we didn't give our opponents any peace. So although we failed to score in the second half we still kept the match under control and created a few chances to score."

Wednesday's win was a personal victory for Ziege, playing his second international after a 14 month absence due to persistent injury and lack of form which ended last weekend in Finland.

"Along with our 96 European title win this is one of the best moments of my career," Ziege said. "I've never scored a hat-trick before as a professional player and certainly not for the national team."

France could still book a ticket to Holland and Belgium next summer although realistically the play-offs look the most likely route.

But if group leaders Ukraine and Russia draw in their Moscow showdown France would still win the pool, provided they beat Iceland at home in their final match.

However, even the play-offs looked a remote possibility when Karapet Mikaelian gave the Armenians a seventh-minute lead against France.

A penalty on the stroke of half-time from Youri Djorkareff, whose mother is Armenian, gave France a lifeline.

And second half goals from Zinedine Zidane and Lilian Laslandes gave France a 3-1 lead although they were made to sweat when a late Armen Shahguldian penalty made the score 3-2.

France coach Roger Lemerre was incandescent after the match, saying: "I am not at all happy. We must ask why. Tonight I am really angry."

Lemerre, normally a genial character, said: "I am not at all happy. If we had opened the score we could have won 4-1 like the under-21s did in their game. But we did not want to. We must ask why. Tonight I am really angry."

Lemerre was particularly annoyed at a lacklustre final 12 minutes after Laslandes had put his side 3-1 ahead. He said: "When you are 3-1 ahead you do not have the right to disregard the laws of the game."

World Cup winning goalkeeper Fabien Barthez was booked in the incident leading to the Armenian penalty and will miss the crunch Iceland fixture.

Another worry for Lemerre is Real Madrid striker Nicolas Anelka, who has threatened to quit the game at the age of 20.

Lemerre omitted Anelka, who had a poor game against Ukraine on Saturday, for the Armenia game.

Russia too had to struggle to emerge 2-1 victors in Andorra with both goals coming from Viktor Onopko while Ukraine stay top thanks to Serhiy Rebrov's goal in Iceland.

Spain's 8-0 drubbing of Cyprus in Group Six was ample revenge for the defeat by the same team last year.

But under Jose Camacho the Spanish have been transformed and are scoring goals for fun. Ismael Urzaiz and Julien Guerrero bagged hat-tricks.

Israel are certain of a place in the play-offs behind Spain following their 8-0 defeat of San Marino.

In Group Eight the Republic of Ireland turned the heat on leaders Yugoslavia with a Steve Staunton freekick securing a 3-2 win in Malta after the Mediterranean outfit had levelled the match at 2-2.

The Irish next travel to Macedonia while Yugoslavia, who beat Macedonia 4-2, visit bitter rivals Croatia, also in contention, for the biggest grudge match in international football.

A goal from Romania's veteran midfielder George Hagi put them ahead before Barcelona player Luis Figo equalised

for Portugal with a superb freekick - Portugal also look certain to qualify as the best of the nine second-placed teams.

The other eight runners-up will all contest play-offs in November.

In Group Nine the Czech Republic, already qualified, retained their 100 percent win record with another comprehensive victory, 3-0 over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Scotland's 0-0 draw in Estonia kept them in the play-off spot although Lithuania can no longer be discounted after a 1-0 win in the Faroe Islands.

STANDINGS

Euro 2000 qualifying group tables after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals, for, against, points):

GROUP 1										
Italy	7	4	2	1	13	5	14			
Denmark	8	4	2	2	11	8	14			
Switzerland	7	3	2	2	7	5	11			
Wales	7	3	0	4	7	14	9			
Belarus	7	0	2	5	4	10	2			
GROUP 2										
Norway	9	7	1	1	19	8	22			
Slovenia	9	5	2	2	12	11	17			
Latvia	9	3	4	2	12	10	13			
Greece	8	2	3	3	8	8	9			
Georgia	9	1	2	6	7	16	5			
Albania	8	0	4	4	6	11	4			
GROUP 3										
Germany	7	6	0	1	20	4	18			
Turkey	7	5	1	1	15	6	16			
Finland	7	2	1	4	9	12	7			
Northern Ireland	7	1	2	4	3	5	5			
Moldova	8	0	4	4	7	17	4			
GROUP 4										
Ukraine	9	5	4	0	13	3	19			
Russia	9	6	0	3	21	11	18			
France	9	5	3	1	14	8	18			
Iceland	9	4	3	2	10	4	15			
Armenia	9	1	2	6	5	15	5			
Andorra	9	0	0	9	3	25	0			
GROUP 5										
Sweden	8	6	1	0	8	1	19			
England	8	3	1	4	14	4	13			
Poland	7	4	1	2	12	4	13			
Bulgaria	7	1	2	4	3	8	5			
Luxembourg	7	0	0	7	2	20	0			
GROUP 6										
Spain	7	6	0	1	29	5	18			
Israel	7	4	1	2	25	6	13			
Cyprus	7	4	0	3	11	18	12			
Austria	7	3	1	3	16	19	10			
San Marino	8	0	0	8	14	4	0			
GROUP 7										
Romania	9	6	3	0	22	3	21			
Portugal	9	6	2	1	23	4	20			
Slovakia	9	4	2	3	11	9	14			
Hungary	9	3	3	3	14	7	12			
Azerbaijan	9	1	1	7	2	25	4			
Liechtenstein	9	1	1	7	2	36	4			
GROUP 8										
Yugoslavia	7	5	1	1	16	6	16			
Republic of Ireland	7	5	0	2	13	5	15			
Croatia	7	4	2	1	11	7	14			
Macedonia	7	2	1	4	12	13	7			
Malta	8	0	0	8	6	7	0			
GROUP 9										
Czech Republic	9	9	0	0	24	5	27			
Scotland	8	3	2	3	11	10	12			
Estonia	9	3	2	4	14	13	11			
Lithuania	9	3	2	4	10	15	8			
Bosnia-Herzegovina	8	2	2	4	10	15	8			
Faroe Islands	9	0	3	6	4	15	3			



England midfielder Steve McManaman (R) tries to get past Pole Tomasz Iwan during their European Championship qualifier. — AFP photo

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Collated Euro 2000 qualifier results on Wednesday:

Group 1
At Lausanne
Switzerland 2 (Turkylmaz 68, 87-pen) Belarus 0

At Naples
Italy 2 (Fuser 10, Vieri 34) Denmark 3 (Jorgensen 38-pen, Wiegthorst 56, Panucci 63-og)

Group 2
At Tbilisi
Georgia 2 (Arveladze 30, Kavelashvili 51) Latvia 2 (Bleidis 62, Stepanov 90)

At Oslo
Norway 4 (Istencic 16-og, Iversen 18, Solskjaer 30, Leonhardsen 68) Slovenia 0

Group 3
At Chisinau
Moldova 1 (Epuryanu 4) Turkey 1 (Havutcu 75)

At Dortmund
Germany 4 (Bierhoff 2, Ziege 16, 33, 45) Northern Ireland 0

Group 4
At Yerevan
Armenia 2 (Mikaelian 7, Shahguldian 90-pen) France 3 (Djorkareff 45-pen, Zidane 67, Laslandes 74)

At Andorra La Vella
Andorra 1 (Ruiz 39-pen) Russia 2 (Onopko 23, 58)

At Reykjavik
Iceland 0 Ukraine 1 (Rebrov 40-pen)

Group 5
At Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0 Sweden 1 (Alexandersson 38)

At Warsaw
Poland 0 England 0

Group 6
At Ramat Gan
Israel 8 (Ayoun 25, 46, 71, Mizrahi 38, Revivo 40, 69, Sevilla 83, Abouci 89) San Marino 0

At Badajoz
Spain 8 (Urzaiz 19, 25, 37, Guerrero 34, 42, 56, Cesar 82, Hierro 88) Cyprus 0

Group 7
At Dubnica
Slovakia 2 (Nemeth 4, Karhan 56) Liechtenstein 0

At Bucharest
Romania 1 (Hagi 37) Portugal 1 (Figo 45)

At Budapest
Hungary 3 (Sebok 28, Egressy 51, Sowummi 55) Azerbaijan 0

Group 8
At Skopje
Macedonia 2 (Sakirli 58, Ciric 88) Yugoslavia 4 (Milosevic 1, Babunski 3-og, Stankovic 15, Drulovic 36)

At Valletta
Malta 2 (Said 62, Carabott 69-pen) Ireland 3 (Keane 13, Breen 21, Staunton 74)

Group 9
At Teplice
Czech Republic 3 (Koller 26, Berger 59-pen, Poborsky 67) Bosnia-Herzegovina 0

At Tallinn
Estonia 0 Scotland 0

At Tershavn
Faroe Islands 0 Lithuania 1 (Ramelis 55)

Greece-Albania match called off

ATHENS, Sept 9: The Euro 2000 qualifier Group 2 match between Greece and Albania on Wednesday in Athens has been postponed because of the earthquake that struck the city on Tuesday, reports AFP.

The decision was taken on Wednesday morning by Europe's football governing body UEFA.

The 5.9 Richter tremor that hit Athens has claimed nearly 50 lives so far and left more than 10,000 people homeless, according to the latest count.

Meanwhile, the European Super League table tennis encounter between Greece and Belgium has also been postponed, as well as Greek league matches.

UEFA imposing transfer windows

GENEVA, Sept 9: European football's governing body UEFA are to standardise transfer deadlines throughout the continent for the 2000-01 season, it was announced here on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Under the new proposal transfer dealings will be limited to two specific periods each season.

The first transfer period is between the last day of the championship and September 15 for domestic moves and August 31 for international transfers.

The second period will be between December 15 and January 31, which is also the deadline for registering new players for UEFA club competitions.

Azzurri feel the wrath



NAPLES, Italy, Sept 9 (AFP): Italy took one beating from Denmark and then an even bigger one from coach Dino Zoff and the Italian newspapers after their humiliating 3-2 defeat here.

Zoff and a furious national press simply ripped into Italy's performance on Wednesday night, after the Group 1 favourites squandered a 2-0 lead and missed the chance to qualify early for the Euro 2000 finals.

"Zoff, what a rotten Italy!" screamed the Gazzetta dello Sport's front-page headline, while the Corriere dello Sport reeled from the team's "Incredible knockout" and Tuttosport dubbed it a "Perfect suicide."

Italy, who hadn't lost a home game in five years, now need a draw against Belarus in Minsk on October 9 to win the group. Defeat would send Zoff's men to a humiliating and potentially fatal play-off.

"What do you want me to say?" asked the coach. "I went badly, really badly. In fact, it couldn't have gone worse. At 2-0 up we thought we'd done it all, but the Danes just kept playing and overwhelmed us."

"We were in trouble throughout the whole match, even when we were winning. I'm disappointed because a comeback like that one really hurts."

"It was a mediocre performance and, played here in Naples, that makes it even worse."

Italy's defence was at sixes and sevens, as Zoff was the first to admit.

"We made mistakes which we don't usually make, and they punished us for them," he said.

"It all seemed so easy, but that's not how things are in sport. I'd told them that over and again, but nobody listened to me."

Italy's press had a masochistic field day.

"Denmark taught us the kind of lesson we haven't had in years," said the Corriere. "If they'd had Vieri and Inzaghi we would have been thrashed."

"We only need one point in Belarus," the paper said. "But we weren't able to beat them in Italy and suddenly they look dangerous in a way they didn't seem at the time and they shouldn't be seeming now."

For Turin-based Tuttosport, the defeat was a recurring nightmare -- even without Peter Schmeichel between the Danish posts.

"It was like watching last April's Juventus v Manchester United all over again," it said, echoing Juventus' 3-2 European Cup semi-final defeat after the Italians had led 2-0.

"It was one of those mysterious of football which no-one has an answer to, although that's also what makes football a beautiful game. But to the tell truth, Italy were as ugly as the game as beautiful."

The Gazzetta meanwhile tackled the root of Italy's problems -- a chronic lack of world-class talent in midfield.

"This national team ... has abolished a fundamental notion in football, that of building a system of play. There's a midfield packed with supposedly attacking players but not one of them has the slightest idea."

Vieri and Inzaghi had to come back to get the ball in order to pass it to each other. If that's not a crime, then it's not far short of one."

Zoff was clearly unhappy with the display, saying: "I am disappointed for the mediocre performance of the team and for having been beaten at home just when qualifying was within arm's reach."

"And what makes the defeat even harder to take is the fact that it came after being two goals up."

But he also paid tribute to the Danes' fightback, saying: "At 2-0 down they were still in good physical shape, perhaps better even than we were."

"They were very aggressive, they moved the ball around well and we just weren't able to stop them."

"It just goes to show, as we said before the match, that nothing is simple these days."

"They played better than we did, they had