

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 before 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 Turkyilmaz were enough for a 2-0 win over Belarus.

Sheffield Wednesday star Nicolas Alexanderson's goal against Luxembourg was enough to ensure Sweden top group.

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 their 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 Isteric put the home side in charge and English Premiership stars Steffen Iversen, Ole Gunnar Solskjær 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.

Oliver Bierhoff scored his 27th goal in a German shirt before Middlesbrough's Christian Ziegler 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 McMenemy, "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.

Ziegler 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 Matthäus made a perfect pass 40 metres to Oliver Neuville in the 16th minute.

The stylish winger tempted Northern Ireland's German-born keeper Maik Taylor off his line and then whipped the ball to Ziegler who was waiting expect-



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

tantly in the middle.

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

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

Scholl danced by a flat footed Northern Irish defender and slipped the ball through to Ziegler 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 Ziegler, 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," Ziegler 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 Mikaellian gave the Armenians a seventh-minute lead against France.

A penalty on the stroke of half-time from Youri Djorkaeff, 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 Shaghdolian 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 Armenian 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 Serhij 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 Urzua and Julian Guerrero bagged hat-tricks.

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

## STANDINGS

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

GROUP 1		7	4	2	1	13	5	14
Italy	8	4	2	2	11	8	14	
Denmark	7	3	2	2	7	5	11	
Switzerland	7	3	0	4	7	14	9	
Wales	7	3	0	4	4	10	2	
Belarus	7	0	2	5	4			

  

GROUP 2		9	7	1	1	19	8	22
Norway	9	5	2	2	12	11	17	
Slovenia	9	3	4	2	12	10	13	
Latvia	9	3	3	3	8	8	9	
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		7	6	0	1	20	4	18
Germany	7	5	1	1	15	6	17	
Turkey	7	5	1	1	14	4	13	
Finland	7	2	1	4	9	12	7	
Northern Ireland	7	1	2	4	31	5	5	
Moldova	8	0	4	4	7	17	4	

  

GROUP 4		9	5	4	0	13	3	19
Ukraine	9	5	4	0	13	3	17	
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	25	5	15	
Andorra	9	0	0	9	3	25	0	

  

GROUP 5		7	6	1	0	20	4	18
Sweden	7	6	1	1	15	6	17	
England	8	3	4	1	14	4	13	
Poland	7	4	1	2	12	6	13	
Bulgaria	7	1	2	4	3	8	7	
Luxembourg	7	0	0	7	2	20	0	

  

GROUP 6		7	6	0	1	39	5	18
Spain	7	6	0	1	25	6	13	
Israel	7	4	1	2	25	6	12	
Cyprus	7	4	0	3	11	18		