



PHOTO: AFP

CAPTAIN-ACT: England captain David Beckham is over the moon after scoring the winner against Finland at Liverpool.

# Big Guns all blaze



AFP, Paris

A majestic David Beckham goal resurrected England's World Cup qualification hopes on Saturday as Europe's big guns fired to put the continent's minnows firmly in their place.

Beckham rifled in a superb second-half winner at Anfield as Sven-Goran Eriksson's side came from a goal down to earn a 2-1 victory over Finland.

The win put England - who prior to the match had been languishing at the bottom of Group Nine with one point from their first two matches - back in the hunt for a place in the finals at Korea-Japan 2002.

A relieved Eriksson was delighted with the result, and praised his players' reaction to the setback of going a goal down.

"It was very good to see the spirit. Coming back to 1-1 and then to 2-1 showed great character," Eriksson said.

"I think we had a very good reaction. Finland are a good team and we had to work very hard today.

"It was a very intense game. They had some chances and we had some as well. But it was very difficult, they don't allow you to play. Whenever they lost the ball they put 10 men behind it.

"But the most important thing is that we won."

Eriksson praised Beckham who has had to sit out Manchester United's last two matches because his club manager Alex Ferguson thought that his gifted midfielder needed a break.

"I hope Alex will rest him more often," joked the 53-year-old Swede.

Beckham's winner came after Michael Owen had equalised for England following a Gary Neville own-goal which stunned the home crowd midway through the first half.

England's best chance of progressing from the group would appear to be as runners-up after arch-rivals Germany opened up a five-point lead at the top with an ill-deserved 2-1 win over Albania in Leverkusen.

The Albanians looked to have done enough for a point when Bleda Kola volleyed a 65th minute shot from outside the area to restore parity after Sebastian Deisler had put the Germans 1-0 up on 50 minutes.

But with just two minutes left, Miroslav Klose stooped to head home a winner which leaves Rudi Voller's team firmly in control of the group.

Nevertheless Voller had some harsh words for the lacklustre Germans, saying they had failed to take on board the lessons of a 1-0 defeat inflicted by France in Paris last month.

"It was the same Germany that we saw against France," the 1990 World Cup winner said. "We were scared of the opposition, we didn't have any ideas, and we seemed incapable of taking the initiative," he added.

Albania's spirited performance was the closest thing to an upset on a night when results across Europe went largely to the form book.

Italy are all but home and dry in Group Eight after two goals in four

minutes from Juventus striker Filippo Inzaghi handed them a clinical 2-0 win over Romania in Bucharest.

Giovanni Trapattoni's Azzuri are now five points clear at the top of their group, leaving the Italians contemplating a straightforward passage to Asia for next year's finals.

"This result was totally deserved by the boys," Trapattoni said after the match.

"It's too early to start thinking about Korea - now we must turn our minds to next Wednesday's match," he added, referring to Italy's tie against Lithuania in Trieste.

Italy's latin neighbours Spain are also in control of their group. They enjoyed a 5-0 romp against Liechtenstein in Alicante which at times resembled a training match.

Gaizka Mendieta grabbed two

goals with Ivan Helguera, Fernando Hierro and Raul completing the scoring. The Spaniards now have a four-point lead in Group Seven.

One of the tightest groups looks to be Group Two, where Portugal, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands are all evenly placed.

Portugal lead the group with 10 points from four matches, but the real scrap could be for the runners-up spot.

Ireland kept up their impressive away form with a ruthless 4-0 drubbing of Cyprus, skipper Roy Keane netting twice to celebrate winning his 50th cap in style.

The Netherlands moved up to third with a 5-0 thrashing of lowly Andorra in Barcelona. The Dutch are a point behind Ireland in third place with seven from four games.

"I don't know about first place in the group because I still believe Portugal are the best team in our

section, but we've given ourselves a chance with our performances in Holland and Portugal earlier this season and now we've got this win here," delighter Irish manager Mick McCarthy said.

"I said all week it wouldn't be as easy in Cyprus as some people thought but we've come out of it well. I certainly wasn't expecting it to be easy," he added.

While the Republic of Ireland remain firmly in contention for a place at next year's finals, their Northern Irish neighbours are all but out of the running after suffering a 1-0 home defeat to the Czech Republic.

An 11th-minute effort from Lazio star Pavel Nedved secured victory for the Czechs who lead Group Three by two points from Denmark, 5-0 winners away at Malta on Saturday.

In Group Four, Turkey and Slovakia fought out a 1-1 draw in Istanbul which leaves both teams level with Sweden on eight points.

Sweden, in desperate need of a win, had Anders Svensson to thank for a 43rd minute strike in their 1-0 triumph over Macedonia in Gothenburg - Craig Brown's Scotland meanwhile could well be left kicking themselves after squandering a 2-0 lead against Belgium at Hampden Park to finish drawing 2-2.

Billy Dodds scored twice in the first half an hour to give the Scots a dream start but a 58th minute goal from Marc Wilmots was followed by a 90th minute leveller from Daniel van Buyten to leave 10-man Belgium in raptures.

The result keeps the Belgians top of group six on goal difference ahead of Scotland, who entertain no-hopers San Marino on Wednesday.

But Brown remained defiantly upbeat about the chances of topping the group come the final reckoning.

"It could be on Wednesday we are top of the group. We will see. Obviously we are depressed and down and they are elated," Brown said.

"That elation could transfer into complacency. They may think the job is done and that would be a mistake."



PHOTO: AFP

Italy's two-goal hero Filippo Inzaghi (R) taking a fall under pressure from Romania's Cosmin Contra at Bucharest on March 24.

## GROUP STANDINGS

Collated European zone World Cup group tables after Saturday's matches (matches played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):

GROUP ONE	GROUP TWO	GROUP THREE	GROUP FOUR	GROUP FIVE	GROUP SIX	GROUP SEVEN	GROUP EIGHT	GROUP NINE
Russia 3 2 1 0 5 1 7	Portugal 4 3 1 0 9 2 10	Czech Republic 4 3 1 0 6 0 10	Turkey 4 2 2 0 5 2 8	Poland 4 3 1 0 12 4 10	Belgium 4 2 2 0 16 3 8	Spain 4 3 1 0 10 2 10	Italy 4 3 1 0 9 2 10	Germany 3 3 0 0 5 1 9
Slovenia 4 1 3 0 7 6 6	Rep. of Ireland 4 2 2 0 9 3 8	Denmark 4 2 2 0 9 3 8	Slovakia 4 2 2 0 4 1 8	France 4 2 2 0 3 1 8	Scotland 4 2 2 0 6 3 8	Israel 3 2 0 1 5 3 6	Hungary 3 1 2 0 9 4 5	England 3 1 1 1 2 2 4
Switzerland 4 1 2 1 8 5 5	Netherlands 4 2 1 1 11 4 7	Bulgaria 4 2 1 1 6 3 7	Sweden 4 2 2 0 3 1 8	Norway 4 0 2 2 5 7 2	Croatia 3 1 2 0 5 2 5	Austria 3 1 2 0 3 2 5	Georgia 2 1 0 1 4 2 3	Finland 4 1 1 2 3 4 4
Yugoslavia 2 1 1 0 3 1 4	Cyprus 4 2 0 2 8 10 6	Northern Ireland 4 1 1 2 2 3 4	Macedonia 4 1 1 2 3 3 4	Denmark 4 0 2 2 3 5 2	Latvia 4 1 0 3 2 9 3	Bosnia 3 0 1 2 3 6 1	Romania 3 1 0 2 1 5 3	Albania 3 1 0 2 4 4 3
Faroe Islands 3 1 1 1 5 7 4	Estonia 4 2 0 2 4 6 6	Iceland 4 1 0 3 3 8 3	Moldova 4 0 2 2 0 3 2	Norway 4 0 2 2 3 5 2	San Marino 3 0 0 3 1 13 0	Liechtenstein 3 0 0 3 0 8 0	Lithuania 4 0 1 3 2 12 1	Greece 3 1 0 2 1 4 3
Luxembourg 4 0 0 4 1 9 0	Andorra 6 0 0 6 3 19 0	Malta 4 0 1 3 0 9 1	Azerbaijan 4 0 1 3 0 5 1	Poland 4 3 1 0 12 4 10				

\* Note: Group winners qualify for 2002 finals. Nine runners-up and third-ranked team from Asian qualifiers go through to play-offs.

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

AFP, Paris

Collated results from World Cup 2002 Europe zone qualifying matches Saturday:

### GROUP ONE

Luxembourg 0 Faroe Islands 2 (Jacobsen 75, Morkore 82)

Moscow Russia 1 (Kholov 9) Slovenia 1 (Knavs 22)

Belgrade Yugoslavia 1 (Mihajlovic 69) Switzerland 1 (Chapuisat 85)

### GROUP TWO

Nicosia Cyprus 0 Republic of Ireland 4 (Roy Keane 33, 89, Harte 43-pen, Kelly 81)

Barcelona Andorra 0 Netherlands 5 (Kluivert 9, Hasselbaink 36, van Hooijdonk 60, 71, van Bommel 85)

### GROUP THREE

Belfast Northern Ireland 0 Czech Republic 1 (Nedved 11)

Sofia Bulgaria 2 (Tchomakov 34, Berbatov 77) Iceland 1 (Hreidersonn 24)

### Valetta

Malta 0 Denmark 5 (Sand 8, 65, 80, Heintze 48, Jensen 77)

### GROUP FOUR

Gothenburg Sweden 1 (Svensson 43) Macedonia 0

### Baku

Azerbaijan 0 Moldova 0

### Istanbul

Turkey 1 (Sukur 54-pen)

Slovakia 1 (Thomaschek 68)

### GROUP FIVE

Oslo Norway 2 (Carew 59, Solskjaer 67) Poland 3 (Olisadebe 23, 30, Karwan 81)

### Kiev

Ukraine 0 Belarus 0

### Yerevan

Armenia 2 (Minasyan 32, Movsesyan 71) Wales 2 (Hartson 42, 48)

### GROUP SIX

Glasgow Scotland 2 (Dodds 2, 30-pen) Belgium 2 (Wilmots 58, Van Buyten 90)

### Osijek, Croatia

Croatia 4 (Balaban 8, 43, 45, Vugrinec 89) Latvia 1 (Stolcers 60)

### GROUP SEVEN

Sarajevo Bosnia 1 (Barbarek 43) Austria 1 (Baur 61)

### Alicante, Spain

Spain 5 (Helguera 20, Mendieta 38, 82, Hierro 54-pen, Raul 72)

Liechtenstein 0

### GROUP EIGHT

Bucharest Romania 0 Italy 2 (Filippo Inzaghi 29, 33)

Budapest Hungary 1 (Sebok 70-pen)

Lithuania 1 (Razanauskas 74)

### GROUP NINE

Liverpool, England England 2 (Owen 43, Beckham 50) Finland 1 (G. Neville 30-og)

Leverkusen, Germany Germany 2 (Deisler 50, Klose 88) Albania 1 (Kola 66)



PHOTO: AFP

French Striker David Trezequet (L) Scoring past the diving Japan custodian Seigo Narazaki (R) during their friendly at Stade de France on March 24.

# French lesson for Japan

## Football

AFP, Paris

Japan's dreams of mounting a strong challenge at next year's World Cup were given a rude shock here Saturday in the shape of a 5-0 drubbing at the hands of world champions France.

With both teams pre-qualified for next year's finals Japan's French coach Philippe Troussier had described the clash as a chance for his young side to measure themselves against the best in the world. In the end, there was no comparison.

A 10th-minute penalty from Zinedine Zidane and a rasping Thierry Henry shot aided over the line by Japanese goalkeeper Seigo Narazaki divided the teams at half-time.

A header from second-half substitute Sylvain Wiltord put France 3-0 up and David Trezequet added the fourth and fifth goals for France.

A visibly disappointed Troussier said: "We knew the bar was set high coming here but we never expected to concede five goals."

"There are a lot of reasons for this. The main one was the qualities of the French as a team unit and the individual strengths of all their players."

"We also lost out on an athletic level. We lost all the one-on-one battles and the pitch didn't help us."

Japan's brightest moments came from Hidetoshi Nakata, the 24-year-old AS Roma midfielder hailed as Asia's biggest footballing star and - along with Espanyol forward Akinori Nishizawa - one of

only two European-based players in Troussier's squad.

"Only Nakata, who is used to playing in Italy every Sunday, was able to compete on a physical level," Troussier said. "We are disappointed, we wanted to show more of what we are capable of."

"But we will have to accept this defeat with a lot of humility."

France's first goal came when the lively Robert Pires twisted and turned in the Japanese penalty area before being brought down by the visitors' captain, Naoki Matsuda.

Zidane calmly stroked the penalty past goalkeeper Narazaki.

Pires, having an outstanding match, was also at the heart of the second goal just four minutes later. From wide on the right, he fed his Arsenal teammate Henry whose angled shot should have been easily collected by Narazaki.

Instead the Japanese goalkeeper allowed the greasy ball to slip through his hands and roll over the goal line.

Japanese attacks were few and far between and it spoke volumes about the first half that their only genuine chance came from a mistake from the French defence.

French midfielder Sabri Lamouchi, playing in place of Patrick Vieira, lost the ball in his own half. It was picked up by Nishizawa and the Espanyol man found Nakata, whose powerful drive beat French goalkeeper Ulrich Rame but rebounded off the post.

Chelsea defender Frank Leboeuf was forced to leave the field with an injury and was replaced shortly before half-time by Mickael Silvestre of Manchester United.

The second half started well for Japan, with Nakata's shot from outside the area forcing Bordeaux

stopper Rame, playing instead of the injured Fabien Barthez, into a rare save.

But France piled on the pressure. An unmarked Wiltord, who replaced Christophe Dugarry early in the second period, headed home the third after Silvestre had headed on a corner in the 58th minute.

Wiltord laid on the fourth for fellow substitute Trezequet with an incisive pass, allowing the Juventus forward to round Narazaki and score.

The fifth goal underlined France's complete control with the best move of the match.

From the half-way line, Zidane's beautiful pass found Wiltord who fed another substitute, Johan Micoud. The Parma player produced an easy goal-scoring chance for Trezequet's second of the match.

"The French team played its most accomplished match tonight if you take into consideration the variety of our game, its build-up and the way our play flowed," satisfied French coach Roger Lemerre said.

"We came close to excellence. The Japanese played in a carefree manner which is good for the sport."

"To look at Zidane, it was like seeing a recital led by a master conductor."

"But we must remember that what's right for today isn't necessarily the right thing for the future."

"But if today was anything to go by, the players still have the same desire to progress."

France, now unbeaten in 10 matches, face a tougher test against Spain in Valencia on Wednesday.

For Japan, who may have to face France again later this year when they host the Confederations Cup, it is back to the drawing board.

# Viva Italia



AFP, Milan

The doubts that have assailed Italian football since all of their club sides failed to reach the quarter-finals of either European competition were swept aside on Saturday by the 2-0 victory over Romania that put the national side in sight of the 2002 World Cup finals.

Giovanni Trapattoni's side had two goals from Juventus striker Filippo Inzaghi to thank for victory in the Group Eight European Zone qualifier in Bucharest but there was much more than that to celebrate with Alessandro Del Piero looking the part again after long-standing injury problems.

"Trap" was quick to point out that reports of the demise of the 'piu bello campionato del mondo' (world's best domestic league) were premature.

"There are so many foreigners in our championship," said Trapattoni, who believes the league's foreign legion must take equal responsibility for club failures.

"However, Italian football is still alive and well."

But the wily coach was keen to dismiss suggestions that qualification for the tournament to be co-staged by Japan and South Korea was assured.

Asked about his pre-match comments that he wanted his

team to perform harmoniously - he wanted to "hear violins" - the old maestro said: "Leave it out. We will talk about that tomorrow at Trieste (where Italy will host Lithuania in another World Cup qualifier on Wednesday)."

Bearing in mind that his leading soloist Francesco Totti had to be left behind in Rome with illness and that Italy had a legitimate goal

the-match was AS Roma's attacking midfielder Damiano Tommasi, still an international novice.

The icing on the cake came in the return to form of Juventus striker Del Piero who was a problem throughout for Romania.

The only criticism of Del Piero was indifferent finishing - one second-half miss was reminiscent of the two golden chances he

as group winners.

But the chances are that when the Magyars visit Italy in October Trapattoni and his men, who have a five-point lead over Hungary but have played one more game, will have already qualified.

Victory against Lithuania - Totti should be available too - will turn confidence into near certainty for