

Germany, vintage Mercedes

Turkey, Belgium and Slovenia confirm tickets



AFP, Paris

Germany belatedly got back to something approaching their old form Wednesday, thrashing Ukraine 4-1 in their European zone play-off in Dortmund to book their place in the World Cup finals.

Also joining in the celebrations were Turkey, Belgium and Slovenia, who also earned their ticket.

Now 30 of the 32 places at the finals are known with just the winners of Thursday's Republic Ireland versus Iran play-off, plus the South America/Oceania play-off winner - either Australia or Uruguay - to be determined after Brazil also booked their passage Wednesday.

As the Germans handed Ukraine a footballing lesson Turkey went into overdrive to blast hapless Austria 5-0 at their intimidating Ali Sami Yen stadium for a 6-0 aggregate victory and their first finals appearance since 1954.

Belgium thanked a Marc Wilmots penalty in the 86th minute for their 1-0 victory over nine-man Czech Republic in Prague for a 2-0 aggregate win.

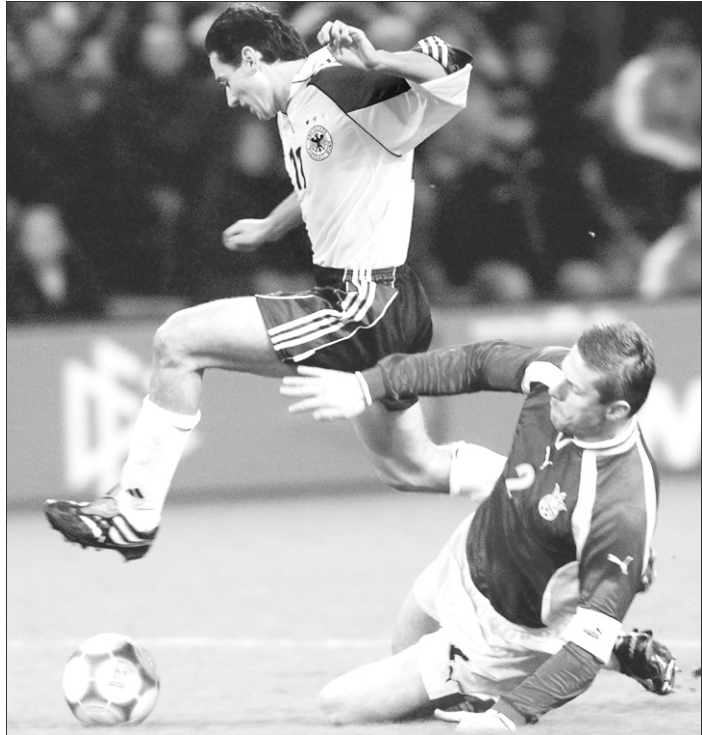


PHOTO: AFP
Oliver Neuville (L), skipping a sliding tackle from Ukraine's Oleg Luschnyk at Dortmund on November 14.



PHOTO: AFP
HUSH! Belgium playmaker Marc Wilmots silences the Czech Republic fans at Prague on November 14 after converting a penalty.

"You can't always just put the pressure to one side. But today all of the players did very well. It was a great showing," said Voller, who added he would be discussing his future with the German Football Federation in the light of this success.

Before the game there had been speculation he would quit if he failed to lead the team through to the finals in Japan and South Korea.

But the Ukrainians helped with their tepid showing.

After just four minutes their defence cracked when Bernd Schneider whipped over a cross from the right and Michael Ballack sent a bullet header arcing into the net.

Another Leverkusen man, Oliver Neuville, suspended for the first game, made it 2-0 after 11 minutes when he scored from close range following a goalbound header from Hertha Berlin's Marko Rehmer.

Just four minutes later Rehmer did get his name on the scoresheet,

making it 3-0 with a header from a Neuville corner to claim his fourth international goal.

Six minutes after the restart the German machine was back to its well-oiled best as Ballack, lurking in the six yard box, headed the fourth.

Schevchenko pulled one back at the death for Ukraine, rounding keeper Oliver Kahn, but it was scant consolation.

Belgium went through amid controversial scenes in the final minutes of the match. Wilmots converted a penalty given after a foul on Gert Verheyen by Marek Jankulowski.

Pavel Nedved was sent off a minute later after a second yellow card for what appeared to be dissent and Milan Baros also had his marching orders to leave the Czechs reeling with just nine players on the field.

Collated UEFA zone play-off results

- Collated World Cup European zone play-off, second leg results here on Wednesday:
- At Bucharest**
Romania 1 (Contra 65) Slovenia 1 (Rudonja 55)
Slovenia win 3-2 on aggregate and qualify for World Cup finals
- At Istanbul**
Turkey 5 (Yildiray 21, Hakan S 31, Okan 45, Arif 69, 84) Austria 0
Turkey win 6-0 and qualify for World Cup finals
- At Dortmund, Germany**
Germany 4 (Ballack 4, 51, Neuville 11, Rehmer 15) Ukraine 1 (Shevchenko 90)
Germany win 5-2 and qualify for World Cup finals
- At Prague**
Czech Republic 0 Belgium 1 (Wilmots 86-pen)
Belgian win 2-0 and qualify for World Cup finals

gate win.

Little Slovenia, who only won independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, drew 1-1 with Romania in Bucharest for a 3-2 aggregate win for their first ever World Cup appearance.

The Germany match, however, captured most people's interest.

Germany, or West Germany as they were known from the end of the Second World War until unification in 1990, have played in every World Cup finals except 1930 - when they did not enter - and 1950 - when they were barred - but this year were on the threshold of failing to qualify for the first time.

They dispelled those fears in emphatic style early on, going 3-0 up after a quarter-hour to easily take their place in the finals for the 15th time and coach Rudi Voller, a World Cup winner as a player in 1990, was a relieved man.

"When you think how things have been these past few weeks you can imagine how relieved I am," he said, noting how close things had been after England beat the Germans to the punch in the group phase.

Voller added that the pressure had been hard to take at times for the three-times world champions.

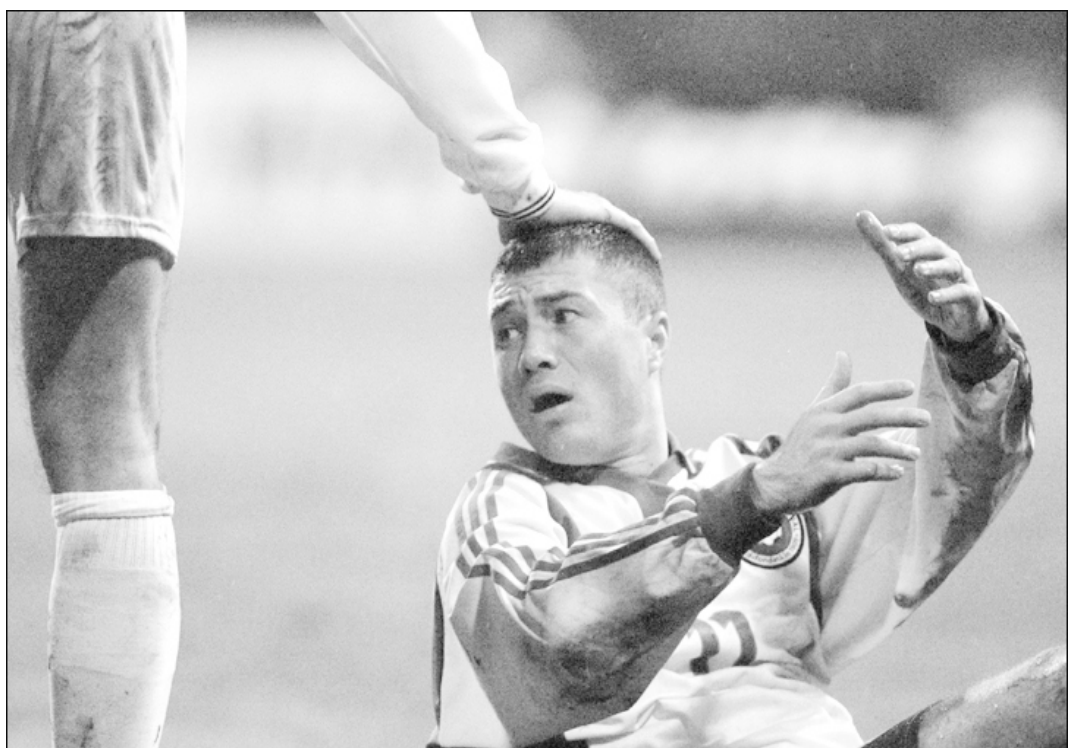


PHOTO: AFP
ONE HAD TO LOSE! An unidentified Slovenian player consoles Romania star Adrian Ilie at Bucharest on November 14 after his team had failed to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

Turkey thrashed Austria for their World Cup berth. Goals from Yildiray Basturk, Hakan Sukur and Okan Buruk in the first half followed by two more from Arif Erdem late on earned them victory in this European zone play-off.

Slovenia booked their place in next summer's World Cup finals with a gutsy 1-1 draw in Bucharest.

The Romanians were quarter-finalists in 1994 but have since fallen from grace and they were unable to pull back the deficit from Saturday's first leg in Ljubljana.

Romania's AC Milan defender Cosmin Contra equalized 10 minutes after Slovenia had opened the scoring through Portsmouth winger Mladen Rudonja in the 55th minute.

The biggest crowd was in the capital Ljubljana, where some 3,000 people watched the match on a big screen, exploding in joy as the referee blew the final whistle.

"Slovenia goes on," "Slovenian football in paradise," ran the press headlines Thursday.

"In a passionate and dramatic match, in which they experienced both cruel and stellar moments, Slovenia again showed their most powerful weapon: collective game and a lot of fanaticism," the Delo daily said.

"It is exactly what has helped them to neutralize Romanian virtuosos and astonish the world," it added.

Tens of thousands gathered in pubs and restaurants to watch one of the most important sport events in the country, which won independence from the former Yugoslavia ten years ago.

The draw in Bucharest completed a 3-2 aggregate play-off win over 1994 World Cup quarter-finalist Romania.

Some 15,000 supporters gathered in the car-park of Ljubljana's Brnik airport to welcome the players who arrived home around midnight.

They chanted "Srecko, Srecko" and "Rudi, Rudi", referring to coach Srecko Katanec and the scorer of the decisive goal Portsmouth winger Mladen Rudonja.

The success is also important for the country's football federation (NSZ) which is now hoping that sponsor interest will increase their revenue. The NSZ will also receive some 4.5 million euros (4 million dollars) from football's world governing body FIFA.

Cuper may unleash twin-terror

Inter Milan's Argentinian coach Hector Cuper is contemplating fielding strike pair Ronaldo and Christian Vieri together for the first time in two years in Saturday's Italian First Division match against champions AS Roma at the Olympic Stadium.

Brazilian striker Ronaldo told reporters at Inter's Pinetina training camp at Appiano Gentile that he was ready to partner Vieri, who returned from a 77-day lay-off on Monday in the 2-1 Italian Cup defeat by Udinese but added that Cuper had not yet decided.

Much was made of the fact that the two, who both were recruited for their world record fees by Inter - Ronaldo in 1997 and Vieri in 1999, were chosen together for a practice match Wednesday.

A fortnight ago Ronaldo was picked for his first start in nearly two years but left the field after only 13 minutes of the 2-0 victory over Lecce at the San Siro with a strain.

Ronaldo's last visit to the Olympic Stadium in April, 2000 was an unhappy one. He collapsed in agony just seven minutes into his comeback appearance as a substitute and missed the whole of last season as a result.

Press hails Mannschaft

AFP, Berlin

The German press was united Thursday in their jubilant praise of the *Mannschaft* who finally secured their berth in next summer's World Cup finals with a 4-1 defeat of the Ukraine in Dortmund.

"Finally! They've done it! We're off to the World Cup," headlined Kicker, the bible of German football.

"Yes! World Cup, here we come," said the Express.

The press, who had heaped criticism on German coach Rudi Voller's World Cup campaign, were ecstatic after qualifying 5-2 on aggregate having drawn in the first leg play-off in the Ukraine on Saturday.

"Guys, we kiss you," said the daily Bild.

"They've done it," headlined the daily Berliner Zeitung.

Berliner Zeitung continued: "Was it really the German team? During the first fifteen minutes the 52,400 fans in the stadium didn't know what to do with their hands - applaud, block their eyes or cling together?"

But the press warned the German team against complacency despite their goal spree which gave them a late reprieve by clinching their spot in the finals for the 15th time in as many attempts.

"The main objective in the short term was achieved. We can breathe. No more or no less," said Kicker, warning against exaggerated expectations in Japan and South Korea.

"The shortcomings of German football have been so obvious in the past, that we shouldn't arrive at the World Cup with high hopes.

"It could still take years before we once again have a top quality team with a winning mentality," warned Kicker.

"Thank you, heroes! But don't forget how difficult the path to the World Cup was," Bild warned.

"If we lay back on a win against the Ukraine we risk seeing the worst to come in Japan and South Korea."

"No one should think that Germany can always get off the hook like that. There is still a lot to do with German football."

And Bild warned Voller. "Seize the opportunity Rudi! Yesterday's match was, we hope, a rebirth."

Surprise qualifiers on cloud-nine

AFP, Ljubljana

The Slovenian press hailed Thursday as their new national heroes the squad that booked their ticket to the World Cup finals with a 1-1 draw against Romania late Wednesday.

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PHOTO: AFP
RELIEF, THY NAME IS SCOLARI! Brazil coach Luis Felipe Scolari (C) is surrounded by ecstatic players and staff members after the resounding victory over Venezuela on November 14.

Samba lives

FROM PAGE 13

Their happiest man seemed to be Scolari who celebrated every goal by hugging players and other members on the bench.

"I want to thank the Brazilian people who always took us into their arms wherever we went. Secondly, I want to thank (Brazilian Football Confederation) president Ricardo Teixeira, who always backed me and gave me the best working conditions," he said.

"We managed it - with a lot of effort and hard work. Now we have to create a really quality side," said Scolari, who added he expected to lead the Brazilians into the finals after achieving his stated objective of qualification and no more.

"My intention is to continue. I don't want to leave. I've enjoyed it. We've got a group, it's nothing out of this world, but if we work hard we can get to the World Cup on a par with everyone else," he said.

Despite their worst qualifying campaign ever, Brazil finished even with Paraguay on 30 points, trailing Argentina and Ecuador. The top four qualify for the Cup, while the fifth-place team, Uruguay, plays Australia for the final spot.

"We suffered for 17 games and I thank the Brazilians who suffered with us" Real Madrid superstar Roberto Carlos said.

Brazil has never lost to Venezuela and has outscored them in their past 15 official games 70-2. Until this year, Venezuela had won just two out of 52 Cup qualifiers.

But the samba kings were still reeling from a 3-1 drubbing by lowly

Bolivia last week, their sixth defeat in the qualifiers. Fans worried that their team might not qualify for the Cup for the first time in history.

"We know we have to improve a lot," said team captain Emerson, of AS Roma. "But we didn't have time. Now we will."

Scolari made five changes in his lineup and adopted a new, offensive formation for the match. Juninho Paulista shared playmaking chores with Rivaldo, while Corinthians striker Luizao joined Edison in the front line.

The changes quickly paid off. Juninho sent a through ball up the middle to Edison, who collided with defender Rafael Mea Vitali and took them both down. Luizao collected the loose ball, raced past goalie Rafael Dudamel and tapped it in for a 1-0 lead in the 12th minute.

Six minutes later, it was Edison who found Luizao streaking up the middle, and the striker fired into the lower right corner just out of Dudamel's reach to make it 2-0.

"I couldn't have given myself a nicer present," said Luizao, who turned 26 on Wednesday.

The Venezuelan attack was inoperative, and Brazilian goalie Marcos made only one save in the first half. The Venezuelans' best chance came on a free kick inside the penalty area when Marcos touched the ball illegally, but the shot by Miguel Mea Vitali hit the wall.

Edison, Brazil's most dangerous threat, continued to bedevil the Venezuelan defense. In the 35th minute, he broke in on the left side,

twisted his defender around twice and dropped the ball for Rivaldo, who fired into the far corner for a 3-0 lead.

Two minutes into the second half, Venezuela's Luis Vera was expelled for a vicious elbow on Juninho Paulista. Venezuelan coach Ricardo Paez was forced to pull striker Daniel Ortega for midfielder Leopoldo Gimenez, and the attack grew even lammer.

With the result guaranteed, Brazil sent in ball-handling wizards Denilson and Ronaldinho for some show time, and the two unveiled a repertoire of dribbles and artistry that drew shouts of "Ole!" from the crowd at Castela stadium in this northeastern city.

Dudamel kept the score close with good saves on drives by Belletti and Ronaldinho in the closing minutes.

- ### LINEUPS
- Brazil:** Marcos, Lucio, Belletti, Roque Junior, Edmilson, Roberto Carlos, Emerson, Juninho Paulista (Ronaldinho, 67), Rivaldo, Edison (Marcelinho Paraíba, 75) and Luizao (Denilson, 58).
- Venezuela:** Rafael Dudamel, Jose Rey, Hector Gonzalez, Rafael Mea Vitali, Jorge Rojas, Luis Vera, Miguel Mea Vitali, Gabriel Urdaneta (Luis Vallenilla 58), Ricardo David Paez (Elvis Martinez, 31), Ruberth Moran (Leopoldo Gimenez, 50) and Daniel Roriga.
- Referee:** Daniel Gimenez, Argentina

Heartbreak for Colombia

Uruguay get play-off place

INTERNET, Rio de Janeiro

Uruguay earned a play-off against Australia after finishing ahead of Colombia thanks to a slender goal difference advantage.

Brazil, needing to beat Venezuela in Sao Luis to make sure of their place, duly won 3-0 with two goals from Luizao and one from Rivaldo, all in the first half.

They remain the only country to have played at every World Cup.

Colombia, inspired by a vintage display from maverick striker Faustino Asprilla, routed Paraguay 4-0 away but their win turned out to be in vain as they missed out on the chance of a fourth successive World Cup.

Uruguay's 1-1 home derby in the River Plate derby against Argentina was enough to keep them in fifth place, level on points with Colombia but with a goal difference of plus-six to Colombia's plus-five.

Colombia scored the fourth goal with six minutes remaining and another would have sent them through as they have a better goals-scored record than Uruguay.

Argentina, Ecuador and Paraguay had already qualified before Wednesday's games with Chile, Peru, Venezuela and Bolivia out of the running.

Argentina won the group with 43 points. Ecuador's goalless draw in Chile gave them second place with



PHOTO: AFP
Argentina's Ayala (R), is under pressure from Uruguay's Diego Perez at Montevideo on November 14.

31 followed by Brazil (30), Paraguay (30), Uruguay (27), Colombia (27), Bolivia (18), Peru (16), Venezuela (16) and Chile (12).

Peru were held 1-1 by Bolivia in Lima in Wednesday's other "dead" match.

Uruguay appeared to be cruising to the play-off when Dario Silva, helped by a blunder from Argentina's German Burgos, gave them an 18th minute lead in Montevideo.

Two points ahead of Colombia

and with a goal difference better by five, a draw appeared to be sufficient especially as Paraguay were unbeaten in Asuncion.

But the drama quickly unfolded. Colombia went 2-0 up in 35 minutes in Asuncion, then Argentina equalised one minute before halftime through Claudio Lopez in Montevideo.

Colombia scored two more in Asuncion after the break but were unable to get the fifth which would have taken them to a play-off and their hopes were finally buried when Uruguay hung on for a draw.

Striker Victor Hugo Aristizabal, standing in for the suspended Juan Pablo Angel, hit a hat-trick for Colombia while maverick Asprilla - overlooked for much of the tournament - set up the first three goals with a brilliant performance.

It was an exasperating display from Colombia, who produced more skill and invention in one game than they had in virtually the rest of the 18-match campaign.

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa said that winning the regional group was nothing compared with what lay ahead if the side are to lift the trophy next June.

"I think we can be optimistic with the squad at our disposal - but no more than that," Bielsa said.

STANDINGS

South American World Cup group table after Wednesday's final round of matches. (Played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

*The top four teams win automatic qualification. The fifth-placed side, Uruguay, goes into a home and away play-off against Oceania winners Australia on Nov 20 and 25. The winner of that match also qualifies for the finals.

1. Argentina	18	13	4	1	42	15	43
2. Ecuador	18	9	4	5	23	20	31
3. Brazil	18	9	3	6	31	17	30
4. Paraguay	18	9	3	6	29	23	30
5. Uruguay	18	7	6	5	19	13	27
6. Colombia	18	7	6	5	20	15	27
7. Bolivia	18	4	6	8	21	35	18
8. Peru	18	4	4	10	14	25	16
9. Venezuela	18	5	1	12	18	44	16
10. Chile	18	3	3	12	15	27	12