

PHOTO: INTERNET

STORY OF THE NIGHT: A dejected England captain David Beckham (R) he walks of the field in front of some Macedonian players after the 2-2 draw at Southampton on October 16.

A Macedonian minor miracle



AFP, Southampton

England were booed and jeered off the pitch after an astonishing blunder by goalkeeper David Seaman helped Macedonia claim a shock 2-2 draw in a Euro 2004 qualifier here on Wednesday.

England were up against it as early as the 11th minute when Seaman allowed Arlim Sakiri's inswinging corner to dip over him and into the far corner of the net.

That set the tone for a frustrating night for Sven-Goran Eriksson's men and although Macedonia lived dangerously at the end, they were well worth their best result since the country won its independence in the early 1990's following the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

For England, who made a winning but unconvincing start to their qualifying campaign in Slovakia at the weekend, the failure to collect three points at home is a major blow to their qualifying prospects.

Only the group winners qualify automatically for Portugal in two years time and Turkey, seen as England's main rivals, have started their campaign with three straight wins.

Eriksson admitted the result was one of the worst of his coaching career, but insisted England could still advance from the group.

"It's a bad result for us but life goes on," Eriksson said. "There are eight games left in the group and I don't want to cry. We can still win first place and I want to fight for that."

The Swede refused to blame Seaman for his error. "There is nothing to say about it. It's done, it's a pity and it was bad luck."

Macedonia manager Nikola Ilievski was delighted with the way his young side held on for the draw. "They showed that they had learned tactically from our match against Turkey on Saturday (where Macedonia lost 2-1 after taking the lead)."

England had twice come from behind in an extraordinary opening 45 minutes that, despite Eriksson's forgiving tone, may well herald the end of Seaman's international career.

The 39-year-old was unimpeded in the middle of his goal as Sakiri's corner flew in from his left, over his head and into the far corner of the net.

The ball was moving at pace. But it was still the sort of cross the Arsenal goalkeeper would have been expected to gather effortlessly.

The fact that he failed to do so can only add credence to the theory that Seaman's confidence has been permanently compromised by the trauma he suffered at this summer's World Cup.

Seaman was blamed by many

for England's quarter-final defeat by Brazil after he was caught off his line by a 35-yard Ronaldinho shot.

The stunned St Mary's crowd only had to wait three minutes before England got back on level terms. Paul Scholes' pass caught the Macedonian back four napping and David Beckham was able to control the ball on his chest before finishing with a neat chip over Petar Milosevski.

But Macedonia, emboldened by their promising start, were continuing to create good situations from midfield and it was no surprise when they went ahead again in the 25th minute.

Sakiri picked up a loose ball on the left of midfield and raced forward before attempting a hopeful long-range effort. So Campbell got in the way of the low shot but his block saw the ball fall perfectly for Vanco Trajanov, who placed his shot wide of Seaman from the edge of the area.

England hit straight back with Beckham and Michael Owen both going close before Seaman was treated to an ironic round of applause in the 30th minute when he managed to catch Robert Popov's hopeful punt forward.

Scholes and Smith spurned half-chances before Gerrard put England level for the second time.

The Liverpool midfielder's finish was exemplary but the build-up had a fair element of luck to it with Scholes' miscued volley falling to

Beckham, whose header across the penalty area should have been cleared. Instead it bounced through to Gerrard, who controlled on his chest and hit a crisp volley past Milosevski.

Sakiri should have put Macedonia in front again within two minutes of the restart. The impressive Trajanov's neat pass split England's central defensive pair of Campbell and Jonathan Woodgate but Sakiri fluffed his attempt to clip the ball over the outstriding Seaman.

Five minutes later, Gerrard chipped just over the bar after the Macedonian defence failed to clear a Beckham free-kick. That was to prove the Liverpool midfielder's last significant contribution of the night. Two minutes later he pulled up injured and had to be stretchered off.

Butt came on for Gerrard and Eriksson threw on Darius Vassell as an extra striker in place of the largely ineffectual Bridge as England pushed for the winner.

But despite a flurry of half-chances all the pressure was to prove in vain and England's bitterly disappointing night was rounded off when Smith was sent off in injury time for a second yellow card.

Welsh wash for Italy



AFP, Cardiff

Under-fire Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni insisted he would not resign after his side crashed 2-1 to Wales in their Group 9 Euro 2004 qualifier at the Millennium stadium on Wednesday.

Italy's lacklustre display will have ratcheted up the pressure on Trapattoni to resign after his side's poor start to their Euro qualifying campaign.

Prior to the Cardiff match, the demanding Italian press were calling for Trapattoni to stand down after a shock second-round defeat to South Korea at this summer's World Cup was followed by a scrappy 2-0 win over Azerbaijan and a draw 1-1 draw against Yugoslavia.

Now the clamour for his resignation will grow, after his side were outplayed by Mark Hughes' Welsh team.

"The thought of resigning has never crossed my mind. I still have the backing and support of the federation (the Italian Football Federation)," the aging Italian coach told reporters after the match.

Trapattoni admitted his side of Serie-A superstars were outclassed by a Welsh team.

"Wales were excellent. They got a win in Finland without playing that well, but they played out of their skin this time," he said.

"They were better than us physically, they were superb physically. Wales were well organised, they were foxy and we just couldn't match them. We did all we could, but maybe our defenders are not what they were," he added.

The former Inter Milan and Bayern Munich coach thought Alessandro del Piero had earned his side an undeserved point when his deflected free-kick looked to have cancelled out Simon Davies' shock 12th minute opener.

But Craig Bellamy's late goal made sure of a victory which sent Wales to the top of the group with two wins from two games.

Hughes was sympathetic towards his Italian counterpart but insisted nothing should deflect from his young side's historic performance.

"It's a good performance and we're absolutely delighted. We needed a good start and we've got

it. They're great lads to work with," he said. Hughes had warned that football would replace rugby union as the new Welsh national sport should his young side defeat the Italians.

"Now we need to keep it going - it's another game out of the way. We're all well aware it's all well and good getting these points in the bag but we can't then go to places like Azerbaijan and slip up."

Hughes can also be content that he has now avenged one of the worst moments of his international career when he featured in a Welsh side that was overrun 4-0 by a rampant Italian side in a Euro 2000 qualifier in Bologna three years ago. The deserved victory extended Wales' unbeaten run at the Millennium stadium to 13 months, and during that time they have beaten Germany, held Argentina to

best teams in the world," he said. "It's a fantastic performance. We deserved the win - I think we outplayed and outclassed them," the combative Birmingham City player told the BBC.

"Italy are one of those and we've competed tonight," he added.

Wales had earlier capitalised on a nervous start by Italy and created the first real chance of the match in the seventh minute.

Celtic striker John Hartson muscled his way through the Italian defence to knock a long cross into the path of Cardiff defender Danny Gabbidon, who hooked his ball high over the crossbar.

But five minutes later Wales surged into the lead. Welsh coach Mark Hughes had brought Newcastle striker Bellamy into the side, the only change from the side that beat Finland 2-0 in

and the Tottenham midfielder rifled the ball past Gianluigi Buffon in the Italian goal.

Stunned by the early Welsh breakthrough, the Italian side pushed forward with more purpose and gradually Luigi Di Biagio began to wrestle control of the match away from Hughes' side.

Italy's persistence finally paid off when Del Piero scored his 20th international goal with a free-kick in the 32nd-minute that bounced off the wall and trickled past stranded Welsh keeper Paul Jones.

The Italians started the second half with some urgency and Jones had to come to Wales' rescue with a reaction save from another deflected free-kick this time from Andrea Pirlo.

But despite Trapattoni urging from the touchline it was Wales who scored the decisive goal.



PHOTO: AFP

Craig Bellamy (L) of Wales rounding off Italy custodian Gianluigi Buffon to score his side's winner at The Millennium Stadium in Cardiff on October 16.

a draw and now defeated Italy.

Midfielder Robbie Savage meanwhile echoed the sentiments of the throbbing 71,000 capacity stadium when he praised Hughes for masterminding Wales' stunning victory.

"Mark Hughes makes us believe we can win and compete with the

September. Bellamy's speed and movement created havoc at the heart of the Italian defence, and he set up Wales' opening goal in the 12th minute.

Twisting clear of his marker, Bellamy sent Davies clear on goal

In the 71st minute Bellamy outprinted Alessandro Nesta before rounding Buffon for a goal that sealed one of the greatest results in Welsh football history.

Ronaldo, Zidane against poverty

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid stars Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane are set to star in an advertisement for the United Nations to campaign against world poverty, the Spanish club announced Wednesday.

The advert, entitled "United Against Poverty", will appear as of Thursday in France and eventually worldwide.

The players, both former world players of the year, are ambassadors for the UN as is Swiss tennis star Martina Hingis and Formula One driver Jacques Villeneuve.

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY RESULTS

International football friendly result on Wednesday:

At Gothenberg Sweden 2 (Pettersson 6, Allbaeck 24) Portugal 3 (Conceicao 33-pen, Romeu 54, Rui Costa 88)

At Logrono, Spain Spain 0 Paraguay 0

Holland outclass Austria



REUTERS, Vienna

A superior Dutch team have swept to the top of Group Three of Euro 2004 qualifying with a 3-0 defeat of a sleepy Austria side.

The visitors were firmly in command, sealing the game after 30 minutes with goals from Clarence Seedorf (16), Philip Cocu (19) and Roy Makaay (30).

The hosts, who played with 10 men after Martin Hiden was sent off with a second yellow card in the 78th minute, made good chances in the second half after substitutions brought in younger players, but it was too late to reverse the onslaught.

Even Austrian coach Hans Krankl, who scored his first international goal for Austria against the 'Oranje' way back in 1974, admitted that the men in orange were "from

another league altogether". "The Dutch deserved to win, they really are a class above," said Krankl.

"I cannot blame my players, maybe they showed too much respect, held back a bit, but realistically there wasn't much they could do."

The first goal, 15 minutes into the game, caught the Austrian defence napping. Makaay slipped the ball to an unmarked Patrick Kluyvert, who tucked it into Seedorf's path for the Milan player to fire cleanly into the goal.

Cocu scored the second after latching on to a pass from Seedorf and the Dutch sealed the win with a shot by Makaay that left Austrian goalkeeper Alex Manninger no chance for a save.

The Dutch are now tied with Austria and the Czech Republic on six points, but go top of Group Three on goal difference.

Moldova and Belarus are still without any points

English snobs!

AFP, Southampton

Macedonia coach Nikola Ilievski accused England's players of being poor sports and took a sideswipe at their captain David Beckham after the two sides' 2-2 draw in a Euro 2004 qualifier here on Wednesday.

Ilievski was left fuming after the England players, bitterly frustrated at having failed to beat a side they had been expected to roll over easily, trooped off the pitch without shaking hands with their opponents.

"The English team refused to shake hands with our players and I have to say we are very disappointed with their behaviour."

"I always tell my players they must shake hands after a match, regardless whether they have won or lost. To do so is only sporting."

Ilievski accused Beckham of being too quick to complain to the Spanish referee about some of the Macedonians' tackles, suggesting his protests were the result of frustration at being well-marked by Aleksandar Mitreski.

"If he (Mitreski) played in England, Beckham would be out of a job."

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Euro 2004 qualifier results on Wednesday:

GROUP 1

At Valletta Malta 0 France 4 (Henry 25, 36, Wiltord 59, Carriere 84)

GROUP 2

At Luxembourg Luxembourg 0 Romania 7 (Moldovan 2, 6, Radoi 25, Contra 45, 47, 86, Ghioane 79)

GROUP 3

At Teplice, Czech Republic Czech Republic 2 (Poborsky 7, Baros 23) Belarus 0

GROUP 4

At Vienna Austria 0 Netherlands 3 (Seedorf 16, Cocu 20, Makaay 30)

GROUP 5

At Budapest Hungary 3 (Gera 49, 60, 89) San Marino

GROUP 6

At Reykjavik Iceland 3 (Helgason 50, Gudjohnsen 60, 73) Lithuania 0

GROUP 7

At Hanover, Germany Germany 2 (Ballack 2-pen, Klose 59) Faroe Isles 1 (Friedrich 45-og)

GROUP 8

At Athens Greece 2 (Nikolaidis 2, 59) Armenia 0

GROUP 9

At Belfast Northern Ireland 0 Ukraine 0

GROUP 10

At Istanbul Turkey 5 (Okan 7, Davala 14, Mamsiz 23, Serhat 82, 90) Liechtenstein 0

GROUP 11

At Southampton, England England 2 (Beckham 14, Gerrard 36) Macedonia 2 (Sakiri 11, Trajanov 25)

GROUP 12

At Sofia Bulgaria 2 (Tchilikov 37, Balakov 58) Andorra 1 (Lima 80)

GROUP 13

At Tallinn Estonia 0 Belgium 1 (Sonck 2)

GROUP 14

At Belgrade Yugoslavia 2 (Kovacevic 54, Mihajovic 84-pen) Finland 0

GROUP 15

At Cardiff Wales 2 (Davies 12, Bellamy 71) Italy 1 (Del Piero 32)

GROUP 16

At Dublin Republic of Ireland 1 (Magnin 78-og) Switzerland 2 (Yakin 45, Celestini 87)

GROUP 17

At Volgograd, Russia Russia 4 (Kerzhakov 3, Semak 41, 54, Onopko 52) Albania 1 (Duro 13)

Germany made to work



AFP, Paris

German coach Rudi Voller put it into words - though perhaps he was only being wise after the event - but there really are no easy games in European football any more, something England's Sven-Goran Eriksson and Italy's Giovanni Trapattoni know to their cost after stumbling in Wednesday's Euro 2004 qualifiers.

Voller wore the smile of a man who knew his side had got out of jail after a 2-1 win over the Faroe Islands in Hanover.

But England and Italy were wiping egg off their faces after Eriksson's men could only draw 2-2 at home to Macedonia at Southampton - twice coming from a goal down - while the Italians scored their habitual one goal, but conceded two, in going down 2-1 to Wales in Cardiff.

So it appears the bookies are on to a winner by making defending champions France their clear favourites, not just to qualify but to win the tournament.

The French, having thrashed Slovenia 5-0 at the Stade de France on Saturday, led Malta off with a 4-0 beating on Wednesday in Valletta, although even they started with the narrowest of wins in Cyprus.

And England's Group 7 rivals Turkey crushed Liechtenstein 5-0 in Istanbul to go five points clear - though England have a game in hand.

Ireland were another side along with England and Italy to experience a miserable evening as they bowed 2-1 to Switzerland for their second straight Group 10 loss which piles the pressure on under-fire coach Mick McCarthy.

A 45th-minute effort from Hakan Yakin late strike from substitute Fabio Celestini did the damage at Lansdowne Road with Ludovic Magnin putting through his own goal for the Irish.

"I can understand criticism after losing games," said McCarthy. "But

I've a thick skin and a brass neck and I've no intention of going anywhere just yet."

But despite his words the ghost of Manchester United captain Roy Keane, in international exile following a furious row with McCarthy before the World Cup, looms larger than ever.

Russia lead the group after beating Albania 4-1.

France are sailing through Group 1 after Thierry Henry scored twice and Sylvain Wiltord and Eric Carriere added two more after the break against outclassed Malta, normally bracketed alongside Macedonia in footballing terms as well as FIFA's alphabetical classification.

Romania made even shorter work of Luxembourg, winning 7-0 away in Group 2 with Cosmin Contra netting a hat-trick. But Norway led the Romanians by a point after swatting Bosnia 2-0 with Claus Lundekvam, deputising for Ronny Johnsen, and Liverpool's Jon-Arne Riise the scorers.

Germany just about succeeded where Scotland failed in beating the Faroes with Miroslav Klose breaking a scoring duck which went back to the first phase of the World Cup.

Klose struck in the 59th minute after early German pressure had brought a planned early breakthrough from a Michael Ballack penalty.

But the Germans had to sweat after an own goal from Arne Friedrich in first-half injury time.

"It was a tough game and we knew it would be," was Voller's verdict. "It was a question of going out and getting three points. You just don't thrash people six or seven nil any more."

Faroes' coach Henrik Larsen saluted his 119th-ranked team's best ever away performance.

Beaming, he said: "I am so proud of my boys. They are amateurs and they gave a huge opponent a real fright. We showed the world we can play."

But the Germans led the group with two wins in two outings, two points clear of the Scots.

Target Seaman, Eriksson

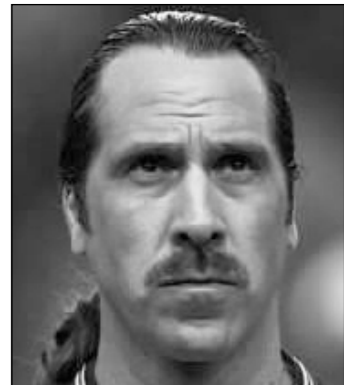
AFP, London

Britain's press Thursday reacted to England's shock 2-2 Euro 2004 qualifying draw against minnows Macedonia by calling for the end of goalkeeper David Seaman's international career.

And there were signs that the love affair with England's Swedish coach Sven-Goran Eriksson, the object of much praise for the understated way in which he guided the country to this year's World Cup finals, was starting to wane.

Eriksson has brushed off revelations about his relationship with compatriot Ulrika Jonsson, following the newspaper serialisation of the British television personality's autobiography.

But back page anger at his tactics may not be so lightly dismissed by either the coach or his employers at the Football Association.



DAVID SEAMAN

However, it was Seaman, 39, who bore the brunt of press criticism after he let in a goal direct from an Artime Sakiri corner to gift Macedonia an astonishing 11th minute lead at Southampton's St Mary's Stadium on Wednesday.

"Sea Sick" was the headline on the back page of the tabloid Daily Mirror.

"After 75 appearances as the country's goalkeeper, the time has come for Sven-Goran Eriksson to bid farewell to David Seaman," the Mirror said.

"Quite simply the man known as Safe Hands has reached the end of the road at international level."

In the Daily Mail, the pony-tailed keeper was called a "not-so-able Seaman" and the paper highlighted some of the other extraordinary long-range goals he had conceded in his career.

"To the names of Nayim, Paul Gascoigne, Ronaldinho, Gianfranco Zola and Gareth Farrelly add that of Artime Sakiri as the footballers most likely to send David Seaman a thank-you card at Christmas."

Gascoigne beat Seaman with a 35-yard free-kick during Tottenham's 1991 3-1 FA Cup semi-final victory over arch-rivals Arsenal while Nayim lobbed Seaman from the half-way line for Real Zaragoza's winner in the 1995 UEFA Cup final.

Ronaldinho's optimistic 35-yard free-kick sailed over Seaman to give eventual champions Brazil a priceless goal in their 2-1 World Cup quarter-final win in June.

And last month Zola's free-kick for Chelsea beat Seaman's late dive in a 1-1 Premiership draw before Farrelly's freak cross-shot from the left touchline saw the keeper embarrassed in Arsenal's 2-1 win over Bolton.

The Daily Express also criticised Eriksson, as well as Seaman, saying the introduction of Southampton's Wayne Bridge on the left had disrupted the successful "diamond" formation used in last weekend's 2-1 win over Slovakia.

"Diamonds aren't forever so to speak," said the Express. "It was back to 4-4-2, and, sadly, back to a familiar pattern."

STANDINGS																	
Standings after Wednesday's qualifying group matches for the 2004 European Championships (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):																	
GROUP 1			France	3	3	0	11	1	9	Spain	2	2	0	5	0	6	
GROUP 2			Israel	1	1	0	2	0	3	Ukraine	3	1	2	0	4	2	5
GROUP 3			Slovenia	2	1	0	1	3	5	Greece	3	1	0	2	4	3	
GROUP 4			Cyprus	1	0	0	1	1	2	Armenia	2	0	1	2	4	1	
GROUP 5			Malta	3	0	0	3	0	0	Northern Ireland	2	0	1	1	0	3	1
GROUP 6			Norway	3	2	1	0	5	2	Ireland	2	0	1	1	0	3	1
GROUP 7			Romania	3	2	0	1	10	7	Turkey	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
GROUP 8			Denmark	2	1	1	0	4	2	England	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
GROUP 9			Bosnia-Herzegovina	2	0	0	2	0	5	Macedonia	3	0	2				