

Azzurri left to ponder



REUTERS, Porto

Italy defender Alessandro Nesta said Sweden's late equaliser in their 1-1 draw on their Group C match on Friday was "gutting" and said he hoped fair play would win out in the final round of group games.

Even if Italy win against Bulgaria in their final match they could still go out as Scandinavian rivals Denmark and Sweden play out a high-scoring draw of 2-2 or more in their final group game.

As soon as the situation ahead of the group's final round of games sunk in, Italian players began to fret about a possible arrangement between the Swedes and their neighbours Denmark.

"We played some excellent football but then we dropped off too deep and allowed them to put us under pressure. We gave away a stupid goal and it was gutting," said Nesta, who was excellent at the heart of the Italian defence.

"We still have some hope. It was a real blow to concede a goal like that but we have to do our work and hope they will be fair in the other game," added Nesta.

Italy, who played some outstanding football in the first half when they took the lead through the impressive Antonio Cassano, will expect to beat winless and goalless Bulgaria in their final game.

Midfielder Gennaro Gattuso was one of many Italians urging the Scandinavians to play to win.

"We Italians are always being taught lessons about fair play so I hope they will demonstrate what they talk about," said the aggressive midfielder who defended his team's performance.

"You can't start having a go at us after a game like that," he told reporters.

"We had seven or eight chances in that game and then they went and equalised with a goal like that. It was bad luck.

"We were on top for 80 minutes. So it was bad luck. But they way we played for a large part of that game is exactly how Italian football

should be played."

Italy coach Giovanni Trapattoni will have three players suspended for the Bulgaria game with Gattuso and defender Fabio Cannavaro both picking up second yellow cards and Francesco Totti having two games left of his three-match

that in their match".

Sweden joint-coach Lars Lagerback said there was no question of anything but an honest match. "I can assure the Italians that we will do absolutely our best and go out to win the match because anything can happen if

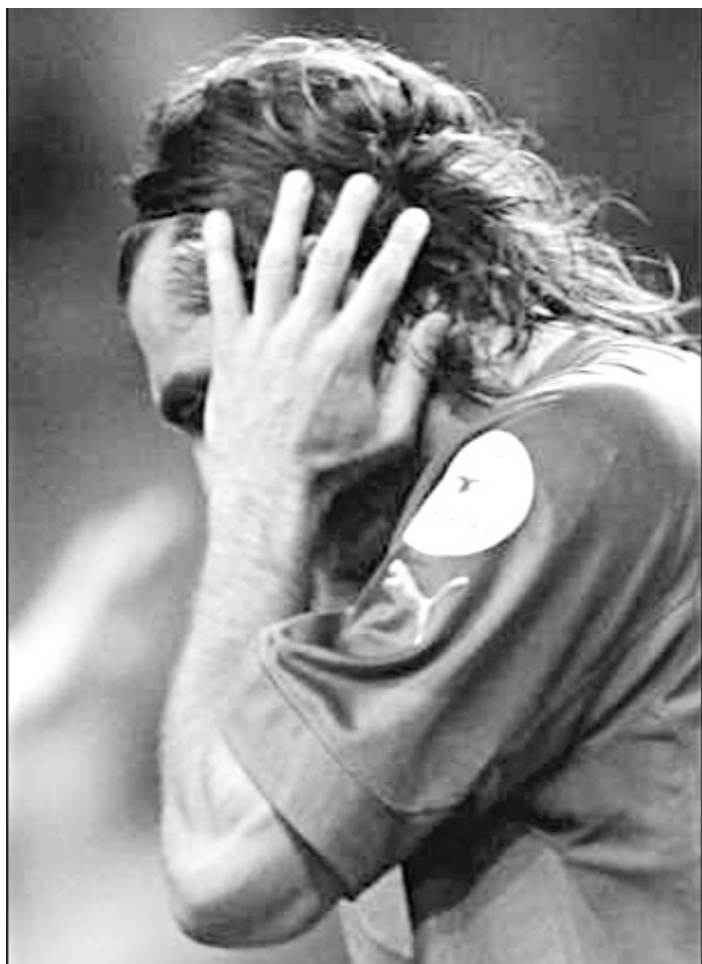


PHOTO: REUTERS

WHY ME? Italy striker Christian Vieri puts a hand to his face after failing to stop Sweden's equalising goal during their Euro 2004 match at the Dragao stadium on June 18.

ban for spitting at Christian Poulsen in Monday's 0-0 draw.

Totti's ban came after a complaint from the Danish team and captain Cannavaro said: "They wanted to ban Totti in the name of fair play and now they have to show

you go out to play for a draw," he said. "We will be 100 per cent concentrated."

Italian Football Federation president Franco Carraro agreed saying: "Sweden and Denmark are two serious teams".

Dravid tired of keeping

REUTERS, Bangalore

India batsman Rahul Dravid is hopeful teenage Test wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel will relieve him soon as the side's one-day gvoeman.

Dravid is among the top Test batsmen in the world, but won a regular one-day spot only after agreeing to keep wicket two seasons ago. The move helped India play an extra batsman.

However, the 31-year-old has often spoken of the strain of keeping wicket.

"Wicketkeeping is not something that comes naturally to me. I look upon it as a challenge and I try and do my best," Dravid told reporters on Saturday.

"I hope Parthiv will be given the opportunity to become a full-fledged wicketkeeper batsman (in one-dayers) that probably India needs in the future."

He said he hoped Patel's improving Test batting on the last two tours of Australia and Pakistan would earn him a regular one-day spot soon.

Shoaib in Pak Asia Cup camp

REUTERS/CRICINFO, Karachi

Pakistan's cricket selectors have invited fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar to attend their Asia Cup training camp.

Akhtar made Friday's list of 26 players despite a row with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) over his availability and fitness for the prestigious regional tournament being held next month in Sri Lanka after a gap of four years.

"He has been called for the training camp. But his final selection would be subject to his passing a fitness test," chief selector Wasim Bari told Reuters.

"He is a senior player and match winner. But he has had fitness problems in the last few months and we have been following his progress for (English county side) Durham closely. If he is fully fit it will be good for the team," Bari said.

Akhtar has been recovering from a rib injury.

Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Hong Kong and United Arab Emirates are taking part in the tournament from July 16.

PREVIEW GREECE v RUSSIA

Just a point away



REUTERS, Faro

Greece will have to reshape their midfield against Russia on Sunday as they seek the point they need to clinch a surprise Euro 2004 quarterfinal place.

Stelios Giannakopoulos, who has a pulled muscle, and the suspended Giorgos Karagounis will miss out, although coach Otto Rehhagel seems more concerned about complacency than the absence of the midfield duo.

A point against the already eliminated Russians will book a spot in the last eight and end the dreams of either Spain or Portugal, who meet in Lisbon in Sunday's other Group A game.

Giorgos Georgiadis and Vassilis Tsartas, whose elegant cross found Angelos Charisteas for Greece's equaliser against Spain, are the likely replacements in midfield.

Greece have won seven and drawn one of their last eight competitive games and are determined

to play positively against Russia, rather than sit back and settle for a draw.

"We are going for the victory in this game despite needing only one point. We cannot think about anything else apart from a victory," said striker Demis Nikolaidis, who may start on the bench on Friday.

Russia, who have lost to Spain and Portugal and are yet to score a goal at Euro 2004, are determined to put up a good performance to reward the 10,000 fans who have followed them to the tournament.

"We only have pride to play for now but we will not be forgiven for any lack of effort against Greece," assistant coach Alexander Boroduk told fans on Friday.

Russia will be without captain Alexei Smertin and goalkeeper Sergei Ovchinnikov for Sunday's game in Faro. Smertin picked up his second yellow card of the tournament against Portugal, while Ovchinnikov was sent off in the same game.

Vyacheslav Malafeyev, who played well after replacing Ovchinnikov against Portugal, is likely to deputise in goal again. Central defender Roman Sharonov will replace Smertin after serving his one-match ban.

PROBABLE TEAMS

RUSSIA (4-4-2): 12-Vyacheslav Malafeyev; 14-Alexander Anyukov, 13-Roman Sharonov, 21-Alexei Bugayev, 16-Vadim Yevseyev; 19-Vladimir Bystrov, 20-Dmitry Loskov, 15-Dmitry Alenichev, 5-Andrei Karyaka; 11-Alexander Kerzhakov, 3-Dmitry Sychev.

GREECE (4-4-2): 1-Antonis Nikopolidis; 2-Yourkas Seitaridis, 19-Michalis Kapsis, 5-Traianos Dellas, 14-Takis Fyssas; 17-Giorgos Georgiadis, 21-Costas Katsouranis, 7-Theodoros Zagorakis (captain), 10-Vassilis Tsartas; 15-Zisis Vryzas, 9-Angelos Haristeas.

Referee: Gilles Veissiere (France)

Same day delay on ESPN at 3 am (Monday)

"Nothing has been won. Everyone thinks that we are already in the next round but this is not true," Rehhagel said as Greece prepared for their final Group A game.

Greece appear to have done the hard work already after they upset hosts Portugal 2-1 in the opening game and then held Spain to a 1-1 draw on Wednesday.

Zizou's the man



REUTERS, Santo Tirso

Marcel Desailly still wears the captain's armband but Zinedine Zidane is now the undisputed boss of the French team.

Gone is the quietly-spoken genius content to let others shout and rave. At 31, Zidane has decided to take control.

It was Zidane who summoned his teammates into a huddle after France conceded their second Euro 2004 goal against Croatia on Thursday and told them to concentrate.

"Zidane did exactly the right thing," said defender Mikael Silvestre.

"I talked to us, he told us not to get excited, he said there was still time to come back.

"It was exactly what we needed to hear, he found the right words. It didn't surprise me from him and his little speech certainly helped us to recover."

The champions had let a 1-0 lead turn into a 2-1 deficit after two Croatian goals in four minutes early in the second half. After Zidane's rallying cry, David

figurehead of Les Bleus.

His skill, his 91 caps and his cool, measured attitude on and off the pitch mark him out as the obvious choice.

"A few years back there were several natural-born leaders and Zidane just had to worry about his performances on the field," Silvestre said.

"Now with the new players who are coming in he has become a leader himself, he has taken greater part in the life of the team. He often speaks now in the changing rooms."

"He just looks great physically and mentally," said Trezeguet.

"I'm going to be 32 years old and I'm certainly at my very best," Zidane said during a week of preparation with France at the seaside resort of La Grande Motte last month.

"I'm ready for great challenges. I now have more maturity and physically I'm coming to my peak."

The inspirational midfielder confirmed this when he scored two stoppage time goals to seal a spectacular 2-1 victory over England in their opening match in Group B.

Against Croatia, he took the free kick that flicked off Igor Tudor into his own goal to put France ahead.

Historic showdown



REUTERS, Madrid

Ask any Spaniard to name his country's most feared opponents and it will be France, Italy or perhaps Germany that head the list.

Portugal will barely get a mention.

Unlike the sporting rivalries between England and Germany or Germany and the Netherlands there is no history of high-profile clashes between the two countries.

Now, for the first time in 20 years, a Spain versus Portugal match can realistically be billed as an Iberian showdown.

Barring a surprise victory by already-eliminated Russia over Greece, Sunday's Group A game will be an all-or-nothing fight for survival at Euro 2004.

Although Portugal have been Spain's most frequent opponents in internationals, the only time the two have crossed swords in a major

tournament was at the 1984 European Championship when a 1-1 draw helped both qualify for the semi-finals.

Historically there was, of course, a time when the two nations were the fiercest of rivals.

Competing for global supremacy in the 15th century, they carved up the known world between them in the over-blown cartographic deal known as the Treaty of Tordesillas.

As Portugal's imperial star began to wane, it was Spain who became the dominant force on the Iberian peninsula, even absorbing their neighbours for a brief period at the end of the 16th century.

Hundreds of years on, many Spaniards retain a rather haughty attitude to Portugal, viewing it as something of a poor relation.

When Portugal beat off Spain's challenge to host Euro 2004 several Spanish papers voiced their doubts about their neighbours' capacity to organise such a high-profile event.

However, despite their traditional bravado many Spaniards are distinctly uneasy about Sunday's game.



FRANCESCO TOTTI

We apologise!

REUTERS, Porto

Italy fans at Friday's Euro 2004 match with Sweden offered up an apology on behalf of Francesco Totti who was suspended for three matches for spitting.

A group of fans held aloft a homemade banner declaring "We Apologise" while another read "Baggio doesn't spit" -- a reference to former European player of the Year Roberto Baggio who has recently retired from the game.

Totti took his seat in the stand at the Dragao stadium around 20 minutes before kickoff accompanied by his girlfriend, Italian television presenter Ilyria Blasi.

The Italian Football Federation decided on Friday not to appeal against the three-match ban imposed on Totti for spitting at Denmark's Christian Poulsen during Monday's 0-0 Group C draw.

Rooney goal stands

REUTERS, Lisbon

England striker Wayne Rooney will keep the second goal he scored against Switzerland at Euro 2004 after an official video review, UEFA says.

Rooney's strike in the 75th minute of Thursday's match in Coimbra struck a post and rebounded into the net off the back of the head of diving goalkeeper Joerg Stiel, raising questions about whether it should have been given as an own goal.

UEFA ruled that shots which hit the goal frame and bounce into the net off a goalkeeper or defender would not be considered own goals.

A UEFA statement said own goals would be given only when a player directly plays the ball into his own net or when a player redirects a shot, cross or pass into his own goal.

Shots on target which are deflected would not be considered own goals, the statement said.

Rooney, who became the youngest scorer in European Championship finals history with his first goal in the 23rd minute, claimed the second goal after the game.

"I hit it as hard as I could and luckily enough, it went in," he said. "I am going to claim it."

CJKS football

CU CORRESPONDENT

Title aspirants Chittagong Abahani continued their winning run when they blanked Friends Club 3-0 in the CJKS-Elite Paint Premier Division Football League at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Uzzal put Abahani ahead 20 minutes after starting with a left-footer, meeting a lob from Parvez from the left flank.

Uzzal netted his second goal with when he found a rebound after Farhad's free kick came off the crossbar 72nd minute.

Titu sealed the victory one minute later when the national fullback with a placing shot inside from the penalty area.

Vaughan

FROM PAGE 13

The Middlesex left-hander scored a century in his first Test innings and 195 runs in the match meaning that he retained his place as an opening batsman.

That meant Vaughan had to drop down the order on his return from injury and he is now batting at number four.

KICKIN' AROUND



AFP, Paris

Switzerland's players appear to have been scrambling to swap shirts with David Beckham after Thursday's defeat against England.

Christoph Spycher lamented that Beckham had declined to give him his shirt following his defensive tussle with the Real Madrid and England midfielder. Beckham reportedly said he had promised it to someone else.

Striker Alexander Frei turned out to be the lucky man. "We met in the middle of the pitch at the final whistle. We had a chat and the swap took place quite naturally in the changing rooms," Frei said.

ENGLAND FAN GETS CARRIED AWAY

An England fan who had overdone the celebrations for the victory over Switzerland took to sea on an inflatable mattress off the Algarve resort of Albufeira. Luckily the man was picked up by a fishing boat having drifted out to sea. Unfortunately, not knowing that he had been found, two coast-guard boats scoured the area and a helicopter was put on standby, officials in the town said.

BECKENBAUER SUPPORTS PORTUGAL

German legend Franz Beckenbauer believes Portugal's exit from Euro would take some of the sparkle away from the spectacle.

"If Portugal exit the European championships it would take some of the shine out of the tournament," said Beckenbauer.

"No-one in Portugal would follow the football."

The host nation need to beat Spain to stay alive.

"If I were coach of Spain I would not feel confident about having such a defence," added the Bayern Munich president.

"Several times in this tournament they have looked fragile."

Beckenbauer won the World Cup as a player in 1974 and as a coach in 1990.

PLAYERS COMPLAIN OF SLOW PITCHES

Several teams but most notably France have complained about dry pitches out in Portugal and blame 'thick grass' for slowing down the game.

"You would almost say it (the grass) was a mix of real and synthetic grass. We asked UEFA to water the pitch an hour before the game but that refused," said France Euro tour manager Henri Emile after France's 2-2 draw with Croatia on Thursday.

UEFA has banned any watering of pitches in the four hours preceding matches.

Swedes' last

FROM PAGE 13

Italy took the lead before the break with a header from 21-year-old Antonio Cassano.

It was totally deserved after they had attacked for most of a pulsating first half and had five goal attempts from Alessandro Del Piero and Christian Vieri before breaking the deadlock eight minutes before halftime.

Christian Panucci, who had an excellent match marauding down the left flank, created the opening with a left-footed inswinging cross for Cassano who stooped low to glance the ball past Isaksson for his second goal in his fifth international.

The only downside for Italy were bookings for midfielder Gennaro Gattuso and defender Fabio Cannavaro, and both will miss the match against Bulgaria, along with Totti.

With Alessandro Nesta and Cannavaro outstanding at the back and Gianluigi Buffon unbeatable in goal, Italy looked impregnable.

The tireless running of Gattuso and Simone Perrotta in midfield limited Sweden's options -- so much so that Larsson was restricted to watching and waiting and did not have a goal attempt until midway through the second half when he blasted high and wide.

But Fredrik Ljungberg and Christian Wilhelmsson never stopped running and battling and eventually the match began to tip Sweden's way.

A win would have clinched them a quarter-final place, now they have to make sure they earn it against Denmark without defensive midfielder Tobias Linderoth who will be suspended.

Big win

FROM PAGE 13

While skipper Rummon Ali scored one for the winners, Asibul Alam and Muzibur Rahman scored one each for the losers.

Rajshahi defeated Gaibandha 5-3 in tiebreaker after the match ended in a goalless draw.

Rana scored for Rajshahi while Tariquul scored for Gaibandha in the stipulated time of the match.

In the day's other match, Jessore registered a 2-0 victory over Faridpur after leading the first half 2-0.

Rajib put Jessore ahead in the 17th minute from a field goal while Jasim doubled the margin in the 32nd minute from a penalty corner.

Jessore will play against Rajshahi Division in the Group A semifinal today.

They can't afford

FROM PAGE 13

despite the best efforts of the Spanish sports media to whip up controversy.

"The referee is experienced and is not going to be influenced by Spain or Portugal," winger Vicente said.

Vicente's form on the left and Joaquin's on the right will be vital to Spain's chances, especially as Raul has been struggling up front.

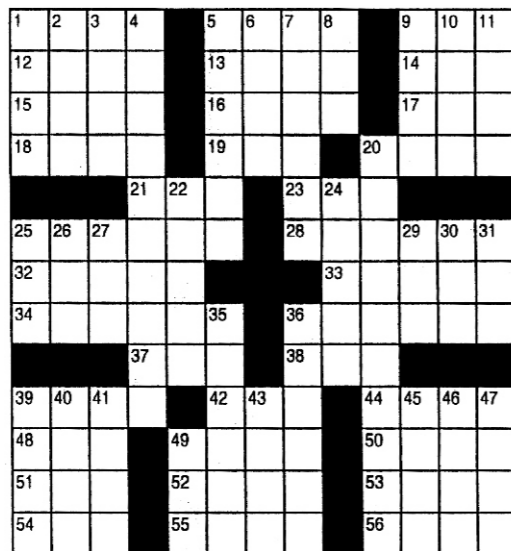
Vicente was outstanding in Spain's 1-0 win over Russia, while Joaquin ran riot in the 1-1 draw against Greece after coming on as a second-half substitute for Joseba Etxeberria.

Joaquin is almost certain to start on Sunday, with Etxeberria all but ruled out with a muscle strain, and coach Inaki Saez will be forced to replace suspended centre-back Carlos Marchena. Cesar and Juanito are his two options.

Xabi Alonso also hopes to make the starting 11 but Ruben Baraja may be a more solid bet to partner David Albelda in midfield.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 37 Socket contents 38 "Town" 39 Go aloft 42 Newton lead-in 44 Unsure mandment 48 "Cabaret" lyricist 49 Blueprint addition 50 Entreaty 51 Silthery swimmer 52 Quondam 53 Sea bird 54 Go blue? 55 Sport 56 Found-son ered 57 Please explain 20 Boutique 21 "Evita" role 23 Perfume-label word 25 Scopes lawyer 28 Go ashore 32 On the other hand 33 Progeny 34 One of the group 36 Maneuver for advantage



CRYPTOQUIP

QC FBHWBOW FXAAWFFCXTTK RUQTF U AUV, Q FXGGBFW RW HUK VW ABOFQJWZ WJ U NUSQ HWWNNWZ

Today's Cryptquip Clue: F equals S

The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

ECB's Olympics dream



AFP, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) hope the popularity of short-form Twenty20 cricket may lead to its inclusion in the Olympics especially if London's bid for the 2012 Games is successful.

England are due to test the international waters with the shortened format by playing a fixture against Australia at the Rose Bowl in Southampton during next season's Ashes tour.

Women's cricket is scheduled to stage the first-ever Twenty20 international when England play New Zealand at Hove this August.

The ECB are so enamoured with the 20-overs-a-side competition that they made a representation to the International Cricket Council (ICC) to employ Twenty20 in their own Olympic bid.

The game's world governing

body are hoping that cricket will be recognised as an Olympic sport by the International Olympic Committee.

Cricket made its debut in the Olympics more than 100 years ago in the Paris Games of 1900 when Great Britain beat France in the final but it has never featured since then.

Bashir

FROM PAGE 13

Shahidul Alam Ratan, who was in charge of spinners and wicket-keepers, also offered a similar explanation without elaborating.

BCB president Ali Asghar, advisor Mahbub Anam and member secretary of grounds committee Rafiqul Islam finally went to see the deceased at the Renal Hospital on Friday to offer their condolences.

But Bashir's family needs more than sympathy at the moment. The demand a proper investigation into the circumstances of Bashir's death.



Rubel Rana (L), who won the 100m backstroke gold at the ninth SAF Games in Islamabad in March, receives a cheque of Tk 20,000 from State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman during a reception at the NSC yesterday.