

Fan killed in Athens

AFP, Athens



One Albanian was stabbed to death while at least seven other people were injured in Greece when Greek and Albanian fans clashed following their teams' World Cup qualifier in Tirana, police said on Sunday.

Albania were the shock 2-1 winners of the European Group Two game against the newly-crowned European champions

The fatality came on the island of Zakynthos where Panagiotkis Kladis,

a 22-year old Greek fan who was born in Chicago stabbed to death a 20-year-old Albanian who was celebrating his side's win, police said.

Two other Albanian fans were injured in the same incident.

There was clashes too in Athens, Salonika and Corfu an island which is home to many Albanian immigrant workers.

In Athens riot police used tear gas to break up some 200 Albanians who had gathered in the central square of Omonia to celebrate.

Five people were taken to hospital with knife wounds and police made several arrests.

Euro champs come crashing down

AFP, Athens



European champions Greece left their fans shaking their heads in disbelief after they lost 2-1 to Albania in their opening World Cup qualifier in Tirana on Saturday.

It was the Greek side's first game since defeating Portugal 1-0 in the Euro 2004 final at the start of July.

German-born coach Otto Rehhagel, however, said that all was not lost on the long road to the finals in Germany in 2006 recalling that Greece also lost their opening two qualifiers ahead of Euro 2004.

Looking ahead to the crunch game against arch rivals Turkey in Athens on Wednesday, Rehhagel said: "We are at the start of group play, we must win against Turkey. We have to talk with the players about the mistakes we made."

The Greeks found themselves 2-0 down after just 11 minutes due to two defensive errors.

"When you make such mistakes on defence, which is the strong point of our team, then things become difficult," said Rehhagel.

"In the second half we took risks, we pressured Albania and pushed them into their own half of the pitch, but we could not manage to draw level," Rehhagel said.

Rehhagel rung the changes after the two early goals placing the emphasis on offence by bringing on midfielders Stelios Giannakopoulos

and Vassilis Tsiartas in place of defenders Nikos Dabizas and Takis Fissas.

The changes worked well as the Greeks became more offensive and a perfect pass by Tsiartas to Giannakopoulos led to the latter heading the ball into the Albanian nets after 37 minutes.

But despite continued pressure for most of the second half, the Greeks could not muster a second goal which would have allowed them to leave Tirana with at least a draw.

"We received an early slap in the face and perhaps this will wake us up," said Giannakopoulos, who plays for English club Bolton.

"We entered the match numb and we paid for it. We must not repeat this. We have to get the three points from Turkey."

Team-mate Giorgos Karagounis agreed: "We have to regroup and celebrate a victory against Turkey. We found ourselves behind in the score and despite a gallant effort could not draw the match. We did not start as we should and we paid for it."

Tsiartas said: "We must put things in their proper place against Turkey. We wanted the win but that's football. We must forget about this loss and correct things on Wednesday. We started the Euro competition with two losses and then corrected things."

A victory for every Albanian

AFP, Pristina, Serbia-Montenegro



Thousands of ethnic Albanians took to the streets of Kosovo's capital Pristina late Saturday to celebrate neighbouring Albania's 2006 World Cup qualifier win over European champions Greece.

The honking of car-horns and the sound of fire-crackers overtook the UN-administered province's largest city after a surprising victory of Albania's national team over the Greeks.

A UN police official said no extraordinary security measures

were undertaken in the capital Pristina.

"We have normal security precautions in place, but at the end of the day it's a joyous event and it would be very unfortunate if something sad happened," UN police spokesman in Pristina, Malcolm Ashby told AFP.

Some 90 percent of the population in the southern Serbian province are ethnic-Albanians. Kosovo went through a devastating war between majority Albanians and minority Serbs in 1999.

Kosovo's Albanians want independence from Serbia, while minority Serb want the province to remain under Belgrade's control.

The 'old man' strikes again!

AFP, Johannesburg



Zambia leapt to the top of a 2006 World Cup qualifying group in Africa thanks to a last-minute goal from 'golden oldie' Kalusha Bwalya Saturday.

Bwalya, a 41-year-old former African Footballer of the Year, rifled a free kick past goalkeeper Louis Crayton to give his country a barely deserved 1-0 win over Liberia in overcast Lusaka.

The winner was a rare highlight of a four Group 1 struggle.

Bwalya, the only footballer from the southern sector to be voted best in Africa, came out of retirement two months ago and scored in a regional championship triumph over Mauritius, also at Independence Stadium.

That match was billed as his farewell appearance after a distinguished career with clubs in Belgium, the Netherlands and Mexico, and there was no pre-match hint that he would be among the substitutes for the Liberia fixture.

Victory lifted Zambia from fifth

place to first with seven points after beating Togo, drawing with Mali and losing to Senegal during June and July in one of five African groups.

Bwalya, who has played in Belgium, the Netherlands and Mexico in his career, stroked home a trademark left-footed free kick in the last minute as Zambia seemed headed for a disappointing home draw.

Bwalya's sudden appetite for playing was spurred by his appearance as a substitute in July's Cosafa Castle Cup quarter-final against Mauritius. He netted within seven minutes of coming on in a match where the sub-standard level of the opposition allowed him a chance to bid a fond farewell to his playing career in front of his compatriots.

But Bwalya, who was the African Footballer of the Year 16 years ago, unexpectedly decided to give himself another run in Saturday's World Cup qualifier.

There are no reliable records of Zambia's international appearances but Bwalya is estimated to have played about 70 times since his debut in 1983.



PHOTO: AFP

REACH FOR THE TOP! Austrian captain Andreas Ivanschitz (L) leaps in the air while his teammates follow after scoring the equaliser against England at Vienna on September 5.

England, France stutter

AFP, Paris



Former winners England and France were held to frustrating draws as they got their 2006 World Cup campaigns off to unconvincing starts on Saturday as European champions Greece came crashing back to earth suffering an embarrassing defeat in Albania.

England threw away a 2-0 lead in Vienna against Austria in their Group Six opener to draw 2-2 with blunder-struck goalkeeper David James again at fault when he let the home side's equaliser squirm under his body.

France, without the retired Zinedine Zidane, were held to a 0-0 draw in Group Four by Israel in Paris while Greece, shock Euro 2004 winners two months ago, were humbled 2-1 by little Albania in Tirana in Group Two.

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson refused to condemn James after the keeper's error had cost his side two points making Wednesday's trip to Poland even more fraught.

Asked if James would be first-choice goalkeeper for Wednesday, the Swede replied: "Ask me on Tuesday, maybe."

"But he has saved us so many times before - so it's not a problem."

Frank Lampard's first-half goal and a Steven Gerrard strike midway through the second half had put Eriksson's side firmly in control of a match they should have killed off before the interval.

As it was, they were forced to settle for a point after Austria struck twice in quick succession.

Substitute Roland Kollmann blasted in a free-kick from 25 yards and two minutes later captain Andreas Ivanschitz unleashed a speculative shot from the edge of the area that slithered under the England 'keeper's body.

New-look France lacked ideas as they were held to a 0-0 draw by jinx team Israel in their first World Cup qualifier for more than 10 years at the Stade de France.

France's last qualifier was in 1993 when they lost to Bulgaria at the Parc des Princes which denied them a place in the USA finals the following year.

Ironically in their previous quali-

fier, it had been Israel who had beaten them when a point would have earned France their ticket to the USA.

From the ashes of those setbacks came a generation of players which won the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European championship but new coach Raymond Domenech, in only his second match in charge, is involved in rebuilding the French side once again.

Domenech promised better things from his side as time goes on.

"The more matches we play, the more we'll get stuck in," he said.

Arsenal's Patrick Vieira was playing his first game as captain in a match where Domenech was having to do without the retired Marcel Desailly, Zidane, Bixente Lizarazu and Lilian Thuram.

Italy, too, were heading for a stalemate until a late goal by substitute Luca Toni lifted them to a 2-1 win over Norway to hand Marcello Lippi his first win since taking over as coach in their Group Five qualifier in Palermo.

John Carew had given Norway the lead in the opening minute before Daniele De Rossi levelled two minutes later.

Lippi made a spate of late substitutions - replacing Alberto Gilardino with Bernardo Corradi, Giuseppe Favalli with Aimo Diana, and Fabrizio Miccoli with Luca.

The last switch proved pivotal when the Palermo attacker scored with 11 minutes left.

In Tirana, Edvin Murati and Adrian Aliaj gave Albania a 2-0 lead over Greece before Stelios Giannakopoulos pulled one back seven minutes before the break.

The Republic of Ireland, despite missing the influential Roy Keane, kicked off their campaign with a comfortable 3-0 win over Cyprus in Dublin in Group Four.

First-half goals from Clinton Morrison and man-of-the-match Andy Reid set the Irish on their way, before Robbie Keane equalled Niall Quinn's international scoring record by converting a 56th minute penalty for his 21st goal for his country.

"Given all the problems we've had with injuries, it was very satisfactory," said Ireland coach Brian Kerr.

It was a crucial win for Ireland who are in a tough group which also features 1998 champions France as well as Switzerland who crushed the

Faroe Islands 6-0.

Northern Ireland, who are in Group Six with England and Wales, saw their mini-revival under Lawrie Sanchez come to a juddering halt as Poland outclassed them to run out 3-0 winners at Windsor Park.

The Poles scored twice in the first-half thanks to shameful defensive errors as Maciej Jurawski and Piotr Wlodarczyk - later to be sent off - hit the back of the net and the rout was completed when Jacek Krzynowek scored in the second-half.

"We gave them two bad goals," said Northern Ireland defender Aaron Hughes.

Wales had to settle for a 1-1 draw against Azerbaijan in Baku.

Welsh skipper Gary Speed, making his 82nd international appearance, had given Mark Hughes's team the lead early in the second half only for Kashad Sadykhov to fire in a free-kick from 40 yards to pull his team level.

Sweden were the night's top scorers crushing Malta 7-0 in Valetta with Zlatan Ibrahimovic scoring a hat-trick in ten minutes in the first half before adding a fourth after the interval.

Argentina carry on the form

REUTERS, Lima



Argentina followed up last week's Olympic gold medal by beating Peru 3-1 away in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

Mauro Rosales and Fabricio Coloccini, who were both part of the Olympic squad won beat Paraguay 1-0 in the Athens final, scored the first two goals before substitute Juan Pablo Sorin

secured the points in a match marred by two dismissals.

Jorge Soto had put Peru back on level times early in the second half but could not prevent their fifth successive defeat against Argentina.

Argentine midfielder Cristian Gonzalez and Peru striker Flavio Maestri were dismissed in first-half injury time for a penalty area clash which produced a pushing match involving most of the players.

Maestri had been on the pitch for only 18 minutes after replacing

the injured Andres Mendonza.

Peru, who hosted the Copa America in July, were also knocked out of that competition when they lost to Argentina in the quarter-finals and their Brazilian coach Paulo Autuori is not expected to survive their latest failure.

They have nine points from eight games in the South American qualifying group and their chances of reaching their first World Cup since 1982 are looking increasingly remote, especially as they have won only one of five home

games.

Argentina went top of the ten-nation group with 15 points, two ahead of Brazil who play Bolivia at home on Sunday.

With eight gold medallists in their starting line-up plus coach Marcelo Bielsa on the touchline, Argentina went straight on the attack and sliced through the Peru defence with some slick passing moves.

Carlos Tevez had an early shot parried away by Oscar Ibanez before Rosales fired the visitors in front in the 14th minute with his first international goal.

Rosales, 23, was set free on the right by Cesar Delgado and scored with an angled shot from the edge of the penalty area.

Delgado and Tevez both went close with shots from the edge of the area as Argentina continued the menace the Peru rearguard while Nolberto Solano was close from a free kick at the other end.

Peru found some rhythm after halftime and equalised in the 62nd minute when Soto swept in from 12 metres after Jefferson Farfan broke down the right and pulled the ball back.

But Coloccini put Argentine back in front four minutes later when he out-jumped his marker at the far post to head in a Tevez free kick.

Coloccini was lucky to be on the pitch at the stage, having escaped a red card two minutes earlier when he hacked down Farfan and then kicked him in the back as he lay on the ground.

Brazilian referee Carlos Eugenio Simon let him off with a yellow card.

Peru ran out of steam and conceded a third in injury time after Walter Vilchez was dismissed by Delgado, who found Sorin at the far post.

Sorin controlled the ball, cut inside John Galliquio and slipped the ball into the net.



PHOTO: AFP

Argentina's Mauro Rosales (R) watches his power-packed shot going towards the goal past Peruvian John Galliquio at the Monumental stadium in Lima on September 4.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

AFP, Paris	
2006 World Cup European qualifier results on Saturday:	
Group One	
At Tampere, Finland	
Finland 3 (Eremenko Jr 42, 64, Riihilahti 58) Andorra 0	
At Craiova, Romania	
Romania 2 (Pancu 16, Mutu 87) Macedonia 1 (Vasovski 76)	
Group Two	
At Trabzon	
Turkey 1 (Tekke 49) Georgia 1 (Asatiani 85)	
At Copenhagen	
Denmark 1 (Jorgensen 9) Ukraine 1 (Husin 56)	
At Tirana	
Albania 2 (Murati 2, Aliaj 10) Greece 1 (Giannakopoulos 38)	
Group Three	
At Moscow	
Russia 1 (Bulykin 14) Slovakia 1 (Vittek 87)	
At Riga	
Latvia 0 Portugal 2 (Ronaldo 58, Pauleta 59)	
At Tallinn	
Estonia 4 (Teever 7, Schaals 41-og, Oper 61, Viikmae 67) Luxembourg 0	
Group Four	
At Dublin	
Republic of Ireland 3 (Morrison 33, Reid 38, Keane 56) Cyprus 0	
At Basel, Switzerland	
Switzerland 6 (Vonlanthen 10, 14, 57, Rey 29, 44, 55) Faroe Islands 0	
At Paris	
France 0 Israel 0	
Group Five	
At Celje, Slovenia	
Slovenia 3 (Acimovic 6, 28, 49) Moldova 0	
At Palermo, Italy	
Italy 2 (De Rossi 3, Toni 80) Norway 1 (Carew)	
Group Six	
At Belfast	
Northern Ireland 0 Poland 3 (Zurawski 3, Wlodarczyk 36, Krzynowek 57)	
At Baku	
Azerbaijan 1 (Sadykhov 55) Wales 1 (Speed 48)	
At Vienna	
Austria 2 (Kollmann 71, Ivanschitz 73) England 2 (Lampard 24, Gerrard 64)	
Group Seven	
At Charleroi, Belgium	
Belgium 1 (Sonck 62) Lithuania 1 (Jankauskas 73)	
At San Marino	
San Marino 0 Serbia and Montenegro 3 (Vukic 5, Jestrovic 15, 82)	
Group Eight	
At Reykjavik	
Iceland 1 (Gudjohnsen 51-pen) Bulgaria 3 (Berbatov 35, 48, Yaneyev 62)	
At Zagreb	
Croatia 3 (Prso 32, Klasnic 57, Gypecs 84-og) Hungary 0	
At Valetta	
Malta 0 Sweden 7 (Ibrahimovic 4, 11, 14, 71, Ljungberg 46, 74, Larsson 76)	

The Gerrard goof-up!

AFP, Vienna

England midfielder Steven Gerrard added to his team's World Cup misery by admitting that his substitution in the 2-2 draw here with Austria here on Saturday was a case of mistaken identity.

The Liverpool star, who had scored the second goal to put Sven Goran Eriksson's men 2-0 ahead, had signalled to the bench that Wayne Bridge was hurt and needed to be changed.

However the bench thought Gerrard was feeling the groin injury which almost ruled him out of the Group Six match and took him off instead in the 82nd minute to be replaced by club teammate Jamie Carragher.

"Wayne had a kick on his Achilles and I signalled to the bench that he needed to be taken off but they took me off instead," said Gerrard. "It was one of those things. You can't do anything about it."

England were in control of the match until the dying stages when they led 2-0 thanks to Frank Lampard's 24th minute goal and Gerrard's wonderful 64th minute volley.

But Austrian substitute Roland Kollmann pulled one back after 71 minutes before skipper Andreas Ivanschitz equalised two minutes later when England keeper David James fumbled his long-range drive and allowed the ball to slip beneath his body.

Another Premiership sex scandal

AFP, London

A Premiership footballer on loan to a Championship side has been arrested in connection with allegations of a sexual assault in a southeast London suburb.

Arsenal goalkeeper Graham Stack, 22, was held over an alleged attack on a woman in Beckenham in the early hours of Wednesday. Another 22-year-old man was also arrested.

Both men were released on bail, pending further inquiries, until October 22, Britain's domestic Press Association news agency reported.

Stack, a Republic of Ireland under-21 international, played throughout Arsenal's run to the League Cup semi-finals last season.

He is currently on a season-long loan at south London side Millwall, who play in England's second tier, the Championship.