

Euro powers breathe easy

AFP, Paris

Three-time winners Italy, 1966 champions England and the Netherlands, widely considered the best team never to have been crowned champions, all reached the 2006 World Cup finals on Saturday.

Poland, Croatia and Portugal also booked their passage but France, the 1998 winners, must wait until the final round of games on Wednesday to wrap up a place in Germany next summer after being held to a 1-1 draw in Switzerland.

England skipper David Beckham was sent off as Sven-Goran Eriksson's men beat Austria 1-0 in Manchester but that setback was forgotten just over three hours later when the Dutch beat the Czech Republic 2-0 in Prague.

That Group One result meant England were assured their place as qualifiers as one of two best runners-up.

It also sent Poland, the current Group Six leaders, into the finals.

Italy beat Slovenia 1-0 in Palermo to win Group Five while Croatia beat Sweden 1-0 in Zagreb to also ensure a best runners-up place.

Portugal came from behind to beat Liechtenstein 2-1 in Aveiro to win Group Three.

Beckham became the first England player to be sent off twice in his international career following his infamous dismissal against Argentina at the 1998 World Cup.

On Saturday, he was red-carded after two fouls in quick succession on Andreas Ibertsberger.

The England captain received his first yellow card for raising his arm in an aerial challenge and then was red-carded after jumping into a tackle on Ibertsberger.

Frank Lampard scored England's only goal with a first half penalty.

Eriksson said: "I'm delighted that we now know we will be taking part in the World Cup in Germany next year. It has been a difficult start to the season for us but, together with our victory against Austria, this is the reward for all the hard work that has been done over the past year."

"Our win today showed the character and determination we have in this group of players. They were focused. The fans have played a huge part in every game."

Italy needed only a draw in their penultimate qualifier in the Sicilian capital but they took all three points thanks to a 78th minute goal from substitute Cristian Zaccardo to win Group Five.

Victory for Italy, who have qualified for every World Cup apart from the 1958 finals in Sweden, was sweet revenge for their 1-0 defeat to Slovenia in Celje in October 2004, their only loss in qualifying.



A stunned England captain David Beckham (L) walks away as referee Luis Medina Cantalejo (R) pulls out a red card during the game against Austria at Old Trafford in Manchester on Saturday.

"I'm happy to have qualified and I'm particularly pleased for Zaccardo as the goal meant so much to him," said Italy coach Marcello Lippi.

"I thought we deserved the victory for all our hard work. We created a sackful of chances and conceded almost nothing to Slovenia."

In Prague, the Netherlands dealt a devastating blow to the Czechs' hopes of qualifying with a 2-0 away win.

Raphael van der Vaart opened the scoring for the Netherlands in the first half with a 32nd-minute goal followed by teammate Barry Opdam six minutes later.

It was the Dutch side's 10th win in 11 qualifiers.

Croatia booked a place in their third successive finals when Darijo Srna scored from the penalty spot in the 57th minute after Swedish defender Olof Mellberg had handled.

In Bern, France, missing first

choice strikers Thierry Henry and David Trezeguet, struggled to a 1-1 draw with Switzerland in Group Four.

The result means that France lie third behind Israel, who lie top but have completed all their games following their 2-1 win over the Faroes, and Switzerland, who are ahead with a plus-three goal difference.

It took a 53rd minute goal from substitute Djibril Cisse to break the deadlock, the out-of-favour Liverpool striker using his muscular presence to capitalise on an horrendous error in the Swiss central defence.

But Switzerland's Ludovic Magnin struck back with 10 minutes to play.

France now play Cyprus at home on Wednesday in their final group match while Switzerland travel to Ireland, who beat the Cypriots 1-0 earlier Saturday and are fourth in the group standings just one point adrift.

"This point means that everything will be played for in the last match," said French coach Raymond Domenech. "They posed us some problems with the width of their game, their aggressiveness."

"Against Cyprus, it's simple: we have to score. I think three goals more than the Swiss if the Swiss win in Ireland."

In Brussels, a Fernando Torres double lifted Spain to a 2-0 win over Belgium and one step closer to gaining automatic qualification from Group Seven.

The win pushed Luis Aragones' side on to 17 points, two behind Serbia-Montenegro who saw off Lithuania 2-0.

But if the leaders slip up against Bosnia-Herzegovina on Wednesday, Spain go through as winners if they see off minnows San Marino.

ALREADY QUALIFIED

AFP, Paris

Countries which have already qualified for the 2006 World Cup finals after matches in the African and European zones on Saturday:

Europe: Germany (hosts), Ukraine, Netherlands, Poland, England, Croatia, Italy

South America: Argentina, Brazil

Africa: Togo, Angola, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Tunisia

Asia: Japan, Iran, South Korea, Saudi Arabia

CONCACAF: United States, Mexico

Costa Rica do it in style

AFP, San Jose

Carlos Hernandez netted a pair of second-half goals to go along with Paulo Wanchope's 33rd-minute strike as Costa Rica rolled to a 3-0 victory over the United States on Saturday.

Costa Rica become the third North and Central America and Caribbean region team to qualify for next year's World Cup.

The US (6-2-1), which already had clinched its place in Germany next year along with Mexico, had been unbeaten in its last six qualifiers - all shutouts.

The scoreless streak ended when goalkeeper Tim Howard, making his first start for the national team in 2005, made a diving save but could not control the slippery ball.

Hussey had a six-bound hit off Makhaya Ntini declared a dead ball when it hit the stadium's enclosed roof.

Ponting, who won his third straight toss of the series, looked to be in control when he was caught by Lara at mid-wicket off Muralitharan for 68.

The Australian skipper followed up Friday's 66 with eight fours and a six in an 85-run partnership off 97 balls with Martyn.

Gilchrist, who scored a memorable 79-ball 103 on Friday, blazed away for 32 off 31 balls with two fours and a six before he top-edged an attempted pull shot off Pollock, leaving the Australians at 58 for two in the ninth over.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard in the third and final Super Series one-day international between Australia and World XI at Docklands Stadium on Sunday:

| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
|--------------|-----|---|----|---|
| Pollock | 9 | 0 | 67 | 1 |
| Ntini | 7 | 0 | 58 | 1 |
| Flintoff | 4.2 | 0 | 23 | 0 |
| Muralitharan | 10 | 1 | 38 | 2 |
| Kallis | 1.4 | 0 | 11 | 0 |
| Vettori | 10 | 0 | 34 | 1 |
| Gayle | 6 | 0 | 42 | 0 |
| Schwab | 2 | 0 | 13 | 0 |

WORLD XI
Schwab run out (Watson) 37
Gayle b Lee 0
Sangakkara c Martyn b McGrath 13
Kallis c Hussey b Lee 2
Lara c Gilchrist b Watson 0
Flintoff b Watson 21
David c Martyn b Lee 16
Pollock c White b Watson 8
Vettori c Clarke b Watson 0
Afridi c McGrath b Watson 0
Ntini not out 0
Extras: (lb-6, w-14, nb-4) 24
Total: (All out in 27.5 overs) 137
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-20, 3-27, 4-27, 5-148.

Did not bat: B. Lee, C. White, N. Bracken, G. McGrath

ECUADOR, PARAGUAY COMPLETE LINE-UP
AFP, Montevideo

Ecuador and Paraguay qualified for the World Cup on Saturday, booking South America's remaining two automatic berths for next year's finals in Germany.

They join Argentina and Brazil, who have already qualified as first and second in the group.

Paraguay sealed their place at football's high table with a 1-0 win over Venezuela which pushed them into third on 28 points and guaranteed a top four finish ahead of Wednesday's final qualifier against Colombia.

Ecuador booked their ticket with a 0-0 draw against Uruguay, which left them uncatchable in fourth spot on 27 points ahead of Wednesday's visit to Chile.

Uruguay currently occupy fifth spot with 22 points and if they succeed in holding onto it after Wednesday's final batch of South American qualifiers then they will have earned the right to a play-off against Oceania winners Australia.

They host group leaders Argentina, while Colombia and Chile, who drew 1-1 on Saturday to leave them one point adrift, are up against Paraguay and Ecuador respectively.

Smith hits back



CRICINFO

Graeme Smith, captain of the ICC World Test XI, has said that the appointment came as a surprise to him but refused to react to suggestions from former cricketers that he was the wrong man for the job.

Smith, who arrived in Melbourne Sunday morning, along with three other members of the Test squad, said he had grown into his job as South African captain and was feeling comfortable with himself.

"Two years down the line, I reckon I have made a few mistakes but also I've learnt a hell of a lot in the last two years. I am very comfortable with who I am and confident in myself as captain."

When his attention was drawn to criticism, most vocally from Ian Chappell, about his style of captaincy, Smith said everyone was entitled to their opinion.

"I've been given the opportunity and it's my job to do it. That's all that counts for me."

But when asked if the decision to appoint him as World XI captain had come as a surprise, Smith replied in the affirmative.

"Three or four years in the international game, two years as captain, it did come as a surprise, but I am looking forward to it."

Smith said he was looking forward to having two top-class spinners at his disposal. Both Muttiah Muralitharan and Daniel Vettori are expected to make it the 11 at Sydney where the pitch is traditionally suited to spin bowling.

"It's going to be a nice challenge for me," Smith said.

"It's different option from what we're used to, but it will be nice to have it."

He said he was not too concerned about handling big egos in a star-studded team in which he was one of the youngest players.

"It would be stupid of me not to use the players around me, communication is an important part of my captaincy. I will obviously communicate with the other players, there are other captains and guys who have captained in the past."

"It's important for me to use them but ultimately at the end of the day, I am leading the team and I am making the decisions and it is my job to round up all the information and I've been given that job and I will do it."

Inevitably, the question of sledging came up. On his debut series against Australia in 2001-02, Smith had gone to town complaining about choice language from the Australians on the field.

"I am looking forward to it," Smith said with a smile.

"I love the intensity at this level. I play the game the same way. I play the game hard and I don't think there will be anything held back."

Was there any backlash after he chose to complain publicly?

"I don't think I was on their Christmas card list for a while," Smith said. "I have played against them a few times and it wouldn't have been different whether I kept quiet or not. I expect it to be very competitive. I am prepared for it."

Smith admitted that he had not realised there were so much money at stake in the Super Series.

An Aussie whitewash

FROM PAGE 12

with a poised 75 off 74 balls, including five fours and a six, while all-rounder Watson cracked 66 off as many balls.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 34 Fool-proof 1 Poke 4 "Unforgettable" singer 8 Hemingway sobriquet 12 Under the weather 13 First victim 14 Writer Kingsley 15 Car dealer's list 17 Draft team's frame 18 North Sea feeder 19 "M'A'S'H" locale 20 Tasteless 22 Jack's prop 24 Canyon comeback 25 Small, like a TV set 29 Chantres chum 30 Strindberg's "Miss —" 31 Deposit 32 Supplanted

DOWN 20 Wardrobe malfunction 21 Wile E.'s enchilada 22 Skier's needs 23 Saharan stock 25 Dark red 26 Ultramaral one 27 Metallica drummer 28 Spuds' buds 29 Cupid's field 30 They hold the mayo 31 Cruising, maybe 33 Aldo-rans 34 Bridge coup 36 Extort 37 Film sample 38 Hayworth or Moreno 39 Acknowledge 40 100 percent 42 Support system? 43 Trail? pack 44 "—" 45 Born

Reefat run snapped

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Reefat bin Sattar's winning run came to a halt in the Fifth Asian Individual Chess Championship when he drew with China's Wang Hao in the third round match at Hyderabad's Kotla Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy Indoor Stadium on Saturday.

The Bangladeshi IM, who won both of his previous round games, moved to 2.5 points to share second place with eight players including compatriot Ziaur Rahman.

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman, meanwhile, recorded his second successive win in the meet beating fellow IM Enamul Hossain Rajib in the third round.

IM Abdullah Al Rakib, the other Bangladeshi participating in the qualifiers for next year's World Chess Championship, shared points with Vietnam's GM Nguyen Anh Dung. Rakib has two points while Rajib was stuck on 1.5 points.

Chinese GM Zhou Jian Chao, Vietnamese GM Dao Dien Hi and Indian IM Nilotpal Das were leading the table with maximum three points.

Wesley, Nicole Japan Open champs

AFP, Tokyo

Underdog Wesley Moodie stormed back from the brink of defeat to beat Mario Ancic of Croatia for his first career title at the Japan Open tennis tournament on Sunday.

The unseeded South African, who saved four match points to win the semifinals Saturday, staved off another two in the second-set tie-breaker before scoring a stunning 1-6, 7-6, 6-4 victory.

The women's singles final was won by Nicole Pietrangeli of the Czech Republic after Tatiana Golovin of France abandoned it due to a left foot injury at 7-6, 3-2 and 30-15.

After the lopsided first set, Moodie once came back from a service break down by hitting a sizzling forehand to tie at 3-all in the second.

Moodie was 6-7 down in the tie-breaker, but his serve-and-volley game made Ancic hit a lob long.

CRYPTOQUIP
Z V Q E G J V S I W S Y L B E Q S E O
X E S W S C E B I V W C P P C
X P G W J , N P S P Z J V W U V

NELOSAXI JXEUSCA ISYV?
Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHEN HIP-HOP TUNES SOUND REALLY PHONY AND INSINCERE, WOULD YOU CALL THAT PLASTIC RAP?
Today's Cryptquip Clue: P equals O

The Cryptquip 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.

Polytan to lay

FROM PAGE 12

Tk 8.10 crore. The highest bid was Tk 9.14 crore," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary Shamsul Bari, also a member of the bid committee.

"It will be a more high quality turf than the present one. The fibres are different from the old one, which couldn't hold water on the surface. It is better that water stays on the surface. The one we are going to buy has granules like athletic turfs that don't allow water to trickle down to the basement," Bari informed.

The old turf, which is ten years old, is likely to be cut up and sent to different corners of the country where hockey is popular. The new turf will be put in place during this financial year.

Asked about the participating countries, Malu revealed: "South Korea will send a team from the Business League. Syria have also named their team."

"Other countries have yet to finalise their representatives but we have received written confirmation of their willingness to take part. If the number of teams increases, then obviously we will increase the number of groups. And in that case, the number of games will be reduced as well as the budget," he added.

Now comes PM

FROM PAGE 12

When drawn his attention toward the budget, Malu informed that it would be finalised in the October 18 meeting of the BFF executive committee. The meeting will also form the sub-committees.

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Did U Know?

First Olympic anthem adopted by the IOC in the 1958 Games.

New order in Africa

FROM PAGE 12

and Godwin Attram were on target in the second half.

Kwesi Nyantakyi, president of the Ghana football federation, said: "It's a dream come true. We're in the history books. Ever since Ghana became a nation we've never reached the World Cup. It's a historic moment."

Togo needed one point in Brazzaville, but lived up to the promise of Nigeria-born coach Stephen

Keshi by attacking and were rewarded with a winner from Kader Coubadja midway through the second half.

Congo led through goals by Bertrand Bouity and Manouna Ossila.

Emmanuel Adebayor and Ma Diafar levelled and France-based Coubadja became a national hero in the west African country of just five million people.

"Our win is due to the effort of the

team and the good organisation of the federation," said Keshi.

"We have confidence for the future. We will work to remedy our weaknesses." The fifth and final African qualifier will be known later Saturday when African champions Tunisia host Morocco in a North African showdown in Rades. Tunisia need a draw to remain top of Group 5 while unbeaten Morocco must win.

His captaincy

FROM PAGE 12

upcoming one-day series against Sri Lanka when he was named captain of an India Seniors side for the October 10-13 domestic Challenger Series in Mohali, the last tournament for players to stake claims.

But he was ruled out of the tournament on Friday after being advised to rest for 10 days by doctors. His injury has given selectors a dilemma as they have to pick the captain on October 13 and the team the following day.

The selectors are unlikely to risk naming an unfit, out-of-form Ganguly.

Life has been tough with India's most successful Test captain since April, when he was banned for four matches for his team's slow over-rate against Pakistan in a home one-day series.

Five months later, he finds his runs have dried up and his body has become vulnerable.

Ganguly had been credited with transforming India into a fighting unit capable of playing competitive cricket even away from home. He had also been lauded for backing under-pressure youngsters.

He was named captain in 2000 when Indian cricket's credibility was low following a betting and match-fixing scandal. He proved his worth in testing times, leading his side to an Indian record of 21 Test wins.

He has scored 5,066 runs in 84 Tests.

AFRICAN STANDINGS

| (Team, Matches Played, Won, Drawn, Lost, Goals For, Goals Against, Points) | Group 1 | | | | | | |
|--|---------|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| Togo | 10 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 20 | 8 | 23 |
| Senegal | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 21 | 8 | 21 |
| Zambia | 10 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 16 | 10 | 19 |
| Congo | 10 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 10 | 14 | 10 |
| Mali | 10 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 11 | 14 | 8 |
| Liberia | 10 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 3 | 27 | 4 |
| Group 2 | | | | | | | |
| Ghana | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 17 | 4 | 21 |
| Congo DR | 10 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 16 |
| S. Africa | 10 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 12 | 14 | 16 |
| Bkna Faso | 10 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 14 | 13 | 13 |
| Cape Vrde | 10 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 8 | 15 | 10 |
| Uganda | 10 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 15 | 8 |
| Group 3 | | | | | | | |
| Ivry Coast | 10 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 20 | 7 | 22 |
| Cameroon | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 18 | 10 | 21 |
| Egypt | 10 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 26 | 15 | 17 |
| Libya | 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 12 |
| Sudan | 10 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 22 | 6 |
| Benin | 9 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 23 | 2 |
| Group 4 | | | | | | | |
| Angola | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 12 | 6 | 21 |
| Nigeria | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 21 | 7 | 21 |
| Zimbabwe | 10 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Gabon | 10 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 11 | 13 | 10 |
| Algeria | 10 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 8 | 15 | 8 |
| Rwanda | 10 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 16 | 5 |
| Group 5 | | | | | | | |
| Tunisia | 10 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 25 | | |