



Netherlands midfielder Wesley Sneijder (L) volleys acrobatically to put the finishing touches on a lightning counter-attack to score the second goal in their Euro 2008 win over Italy at Berne on Monday.

## Italy drown in Oranje

REUTERS, Berne

Netherlands romped to a stunning 3-0 win over world champions Italy in the first clash of the heavyweights at Euro 2008 in the Stade de Suisse on Monday.

A controversial goal from Ruud van Nistelrooy, a superbly executed volley by birthday boy Wesley Sneijder and a breakaway third from the head of Giovanni van Bronckhorst led in the game produced the first major upset of this year's finals.

"To win 3-0 against Italy, a team with so much experience and quality in their team, we didn't expect that," said Netherlands coach Marco van Basten. "It was a truly good team performance from the whole team."

The win was the first by the Dutch over Italy since the 1978 World Cup finals and put them top of Group C after France and Romania drew 0-0 in the day's first game in Zurich.

It was the biggest margin of victory by Netherlands over Italy as they consigned their devastated opponents to their worst loss at a European Championship finals.

Italy's shocked coach Roberto Donadoni, who had presided over their heaviest tournament defeat

since the 4-1 loss to Brazil in the 1970 World Cup final, just wanted to look ahead.

"I don't want to say that it's the worst Italy performance of my time in charge," he said. "We let in two goals by making mistakes. We haven't started well but we must look forward."

The match in Berne turned in five dramatic minutes in the first half when Marco van Basten's side scored twice, although the first should not have been allowed to stand.

Striker Van Nistelrooy looked clearly offside when he turned in a shot from Sneijder, who was celebrating his 24th birthday, after 26 minutes.

Despite vehement Italian protests to the linesman, Swedish referee Peter Frojdeldt ignored their calls to the delight of the vast swathes of orange-clad Dutch fans in the stadium.

Later there was confusion over whether Italy defender Christian Panucci played the Dutch striker outside after the fullback fell and went off the field of play behind the byline. Austrian referees' commission chairman Gerhard Kapl was quoted on Web site www.sport.at saying: "The injured player behind the goal counts as a player on the

field and therefore it was not offside."

Donadoni took the decision calmly despite the controversy saying: "There is no sense in thinking now whether it was offside or not. I accept it... There's no point crying about it. If he (the referee) made a mistake... he's human."

The Dutch had more to cheer five minutes later when they doubled their lead with the best goal of the tournament so far.

It began when a corner by Andrea Pirlo at the other end of the field took a deflection off a Dutch player before being cleared off the line by Giovanni van Bronckhorst.

He then ran 50 metres to continue the move after Sneijder and Rafael van der Vaart had taken it out of the Dutch defence.

Van Bronckhorst sent a huge cross-field pass to Dirk Kuyt who headed the ball back for Sneijder to volley home brilliantly between Italian keeper Gianluigi Buffon and his near post.

Italy had chances and Luca Toni should have given them the lead after 12 minutes but headed wide, while Antonio Di Natale's shot was smothered by Edwin van der Sar before the break. They must now improve quickly if they are to reach the last eight.

## SWITZERLAND V TURKEY

# Co-hosts expect a battle

AFP, Basel

Switzerland star Tranquillo Barnetta is steeling himself for a "hard-fought and aggressive" clash with Turkey as the two countries go head-to-head for the first time since their last match ended in a notorious brawl.

Wednesday's make-or-break group C clash at St-Jakob Park takes place against a backdrop of bitter memories of the 'battle of Istanbul' that erupted after Switzerland had edged out the Turks in a play-off to claim their place in the 2006 World Cup finals.

With both sides having lost their opening matches in the group, neither can afford another defeat here. But while anticipating a ferociously contested encounter, Barnetta believes the match will be played in the right spirit.

"Of course we haven't forgotten that match and what happened there, but this is a different game, even if it is a sort of final again."

A similar message was being sent out from the Turkish camp. "We have forgotten about that match," said the Fenerbahce midfielder Ugur Boralt. "We are going to play a group game against the host nation - that's all."

The reality however is that both squads contain survivors of the melee that broke out at the end of

the second leg of the play-off, which saw players and officials on both sides laying into each other after the Swiss had clinched qualification on the away goals rule after having their 2-0 first leg advantage overturned by a 4-2 defeat in Turkey.

The ensuing FIFA investigation held Turkey primarily responsible for the post-match violence with three of their players and an assistant coach receiving bans while the national team was obliged to play six home matches outside the country.

The Swiss had one player and their physiotherapist suspended but there is a lingering sense of resentment in Turkey that their opponents got off lightly thanks to the influence of their compatriot, the FIFA President Sepp Blatter.

Both teams still have the same coaches with Jakob 'Kobi' Kuhn in charge of the Euro 2008 co-hosts and Fatih Terim at the helm of Turkey.

Both coaches have been anxious to play down the inevitable 'Istanbul II' pre-match hype. "For us it is just another game, one we have to win," said Fatih. "I want everything to run perfectly - and peacefully."

The Turkish coach was fortunate to escape sanction in Istanbul for what appeared to be a highly provocative role in the

incidents that followed that match.

But since arriving in Switzerland he has struck a conciliatory tone, acknowledging that the Swiss were unlucky to lose their opening match (1-0 to the Czech Republic) while offering support and sympathy to Kuhn, who has had to cope with his wife being hospitalised following an epileptic seizure last week.

After a 2-0 defeat by Portugal in their opening group A match, the Turks cannot afford to be generous on the pitch however.

Switzerland's hopes have been hit by the loss of captain and leading goalscorer Alex Frei to a knee injury, which means that his place will be taken by experienced playmaker Hakan Yakin, who could have opted to play for Turkey, his parents' homeland.

Barnetta admits Frei's touch in front of goal -- 35 in 60 internationals -- will be missed, but believes the Swiss can compensate by getting more men forward from midfield.

"Turkey play an attacking game which is good for us," said the Bayer Leverkusen midfielder.

"Portugal had a lot of space against them so we need to keep it tight at the back and be quick to attack when we win the ball. We need an absolute determination to score."

## Buffon left raging

INTERNET, undated

Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon believes the 3-0 capitulation to Holland in their Euro 2008 opener was the national side's worst display in his Azzurri career.

It was a nightmare occasion for the Juventus veteran who served as captain in place of injured skipper Fabio Cannavaro.

Roberto Donadoni's team are reigning world champions and were among the pre-tournament favourites - a status that will not have been helped after they were played off the park by the dominant Dutch.

"We apologise to our fans," he said. "We hope that we will react immediately and show our pride in our next game."

"Against Holland we have played the worst game since I joined the national team 12 years ago."

Now the Italians face a very awkward route to qualification as they take on Romania and France, who fought out a goalless draw yesterday.

Italy know they must win against Romania to avoid an early exit before taking on Les Bleus in what could be do or die for both sides.

## French promise improvement

INTERNET, undated

France midfielder Jeremy Toulalan has tipped his teammates to raise their performance levels against Holland after they drew a blank against Romania in their Euro 2008 Group C opener.

The French failed to break down a stubborn Romanian defence as a low-quality match ended in a 0-0 draw at the Letzigrund.

Romania were negative and were clearly intent on picking up a point, but Toulalan reckons it will be a different story against the more offensive-minded Dutch on Friday.

"It is sometimes easier to play against the bigger teams," said the Lyon midfielder, who impressed against Romania as a stand-in for injured skipper Patrick Vieira.

"If the Dutch come and play a little more and not like the Romanians, it will be better for us. We are ready for what is coming."

"We tried but it was a difficult match, especially with Romania not playing too much football."

Nicolas Anelka and Florent Malouda wasted the only decent chances France created as they struggled to find the guile required to break the deadlock against Romania.

With Zinedine Zidane now retired, the pressure is on Franck Ribery to take up the playmaker mantle but the Bayern Munich star had an off-day.

Karim Benzema, the young Lyon striker who has been tipped for big things, also failed to shine, leaving Romania coach Victor Piturca to question the depth of reserves in the France squad.

"Maybe France are no longer at the same level as they have been in the past - we could see that here," he said.

"They still have very good players who are experienced, but a couple of them are a little old now."

"Maybe they are tired of playing all these finals and maybe they are being nice and giving somebody else a chance to win something."

## Media scorn Azzurri

REUTERS, Milan

Italian media lambasted the world champions on Tuesday for a woeful performance in their 3-0 defeat by the Dutch in their Euro 2008 Group C opener.

"Ouch. What a blow!" read the banner headline on the front page of Gazzetta dello Sport, the widely read national sports daily. "Holland gives us a lesson."

In the first clash of the heavyweights on Monday, the Netherlands consigned Italy to their worst loss at a European Championship.

"The Dutch deserve it... (because they played) as if they were the world champions and not us," wrote one Gazzetta columnist.

"It is the beginning that already feels like the end," he continued. "We have to beat Romania and then France to stay the course. But

who still believes it after a fall like that?"

Like many others, La Repubblica newspaper criticised the team's lineup and the holes in the defence. It also said the team were indecisive, letting Netherlands take the initiative.

One of its columnists joked about the meaning behind the perpetually sad look on coach Roberto Donadoni's face. "Maybe it is because he sees things ahead of time."

Another major daily, Corriere della Sera, said the team had to

learn to be more humble.

"It is not right to think that being world champions gives us some sort of special immunity, like it would not be right to think that everything is over now," one of its columnists said.

"We can argue about the match

TODAY'S MATCHES			
Teams	Time	Venue	
Czech Rep v Portugal	10:00pm	Geneva	
Switzerland v Turkey	12:45am (Thursday)	Basel	

## CZECH REPUBLIC V PORTUGAL

# Teams seek to progress

AFP, Geneva

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari says his side will be confident -- but not too confident -- when they face the Czech Republic here on Wednesday with a Euro 2008 quarterfinal place at stake.

Euro 2004 finalists Portugal were impressive on Saturday night when they sealed a 2-0 win over Turkey at the Stade de Geneve to top Group A, while the Czechs also opened with a 1-0 win over Switzerland in Basel.

Portugal's Pepe and Raul Meireles scored second-half goals in Geneva to see off Turkey and Scolari's side look destined for the knock-out phase.

But Czech substitute Vaclav Sverkos gave his side a winning start with a second-half strike that broke Switzerland after some dogged resistance.

A win for either side here would put them in the last eight, with Scolari saying he expects a tough examination from the Czech team

and will be doing his homework.

"We'll be confident (against the Czech Republic) but not too confident," said Scolari.

"We'll watch videos of the Czechs -- they play in a different way to Turkey, let's see if we can keep it up and keep playing this beautiful football as that way we'll go through to the second round."

"We are halfway on the road to qualifying. If we get six points we should qualify, so 50 per cent after one match is excellent. It gives us some breathing space."

But Portugal's Manchester United 23-year-old star Cristiano Ronaldo, who took over the captaincy, was keeping his feet on the ground.

"If we continue like this we can go far at this Euro, but we have to stay calm, we haven't won anything yet."

The Czechs veteran coach Karel Bruckner insisted standards must be raised ahead of Portugal as his side looked a bit bereft of creative ideas and sorely missed the injured

playmaker and captain Tomas Rosicky.

He said: "We have to analyse our last game, because we weren't faultless and there are things to work on."

"Our next game will also be very difficult."

Bruckner brought Sverkos off the bench as their lone forward against the Swiss in place of towering Nuremberg striker Jan Koller and the move paid off with Sverkos hitting the winner.

"I don't believe I can replace a player like Jan Koller, maybe no one can," Sverkos said of Koller who will retire from the national side after the finals.

"If we stick to the current system, it's very important for the team that Jan plays."

"He works very hard for us, especially closing down defenders. He's a unique player in terms of bringing the ball down and playing it on the ground. I believe there is no player like him, not in our team, not in any team. He's unique."

## 'Goal was not offside'

AFP, Berne

Ruud van Nistelrooy's opener in Holland's 3-0 demolition of Italy here on Monday was not offside, the chairman of Austria's refereeing commission Gerhard Kapl insisted after the game.

According to Kapl the Dutch striker was played inside by Italian defender Christian Panucci, who had been injured moments earlier and who was behind the goal line as Van Nistelrooy fired home.

Kapl told Austrian news agency APA that, contrary to Italian protests, the decision by Swedish referee Peter Frojdeldt to award the goal was "100 per cent correct, without any doubt."

Kapl added that article 11.4.1. of the refereeing code stipulated that "an opposing player cannot be offside when one of the last two defenders has left the field of play," as in the case of Panucci.

He explained the rule was precisely designed to prevent a team trying to provoke an offside deliberately in such circumstances as materialised in Monday's match.

## C'Ron the most handsome

AFP, Vienna

Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo is the hottest player at this year's European football championship and not just because of his dribbling skills, according to a Europe-wide women's survey.

The Manchester United striker was voted most beautiful player of the tournament, in a poll of 12,000 women carried out by electronics company LG.

French forward Thierry Henry came in second, ahead of injured Italian skipper Fabio Cannavaro and Freddie Ljungberg of Sweden who drew for third place.

Talent and his Latin good looks won Ronaldo the title, according to the survey.

His biggest fans were apparently Italian, German and Swedish women.

## Dutch press go wild

INTERNET, undated

Dutch newspapers ran out of superlatives on Tuesday to describe their team's convincing 3-0 victory over the highly fancied Italian team in its Euro 2008 opener. "A dream start" to the European championships was a widespread view after Sunday's memorable match in Berne, Switzerland.

Close to 7 million had viewed the triumph on television in pubs and at homes throughout this country of 16.4 million, according to initial statistics.

"This is the way to grab a European title," sports paper AD Sportwereld Pro trumpeted, predicting great things to come from Marco van Basten's orange-shirted squad.

The daily Trouw trumpeted: "Oranje demolishes the world champions."

De Telegraaf was at a loss for words in its own language, reaching instead for Italian. "Oranje Bellissimo," was emblazoned in huge letters across the broadsheet's front page.

De Volkskrant was loud in its praise of Van Basten, the Dutch coach who has not always been given an easy ride by the press.

"The team, so often criticised for average play, gave its best display in almost four years under Van Basten," it said, recalling the glory days of Dutch football of the 1970s, when the team took second place in the 1974 World Cup.

Players like Wesley Sneijder and Rafael van der Vaart had shown "flair, drive, irrepressibility, insight and, above all, technical skills," it said.

## Basten in dreamland

AFP, Berne

Marco van Basten believes Holland have earned the right to dream of glory at Euro 2008 after their 3-0 demolition of world champions Italy kicked the tournament into life.

Holland's first win over the Italians in three decades and Italy's heaviest defeat in 25 years has left the Dutch in control of a 'group of death' that also includes France and Romania, whose turgid goalless draw could not have been further removed from the exhilarating encounter served up here on Monday evening.

For the Dutch coach, the manner of the victory was every bit as important as its unlikely scale.

"To beat the world champions playing football to the last minute - it was for us a very nice game and also a historical game," he said. "We have never beaten Italy by three goals."

"If you think we were without players like Arjen Robben and Ryan Babel, the players reacted in a wonderful way. They fought like a team and if the spirit is like it was tonight, with all the quality we have, we can have nice dreams."

"Hopefully we can preserve the spirit we displayed on the pitch tonight and continue in the same vein against France and Romania," added van Basten.

"It only the very first step and we know very well that we are back to square one if we lose against France in our next match."

Despite a defeat which will put him under severe pressure, Italy coach Roberto Donadoni voiced confidence that his players could turn things around.

"The game started badly for us and ended up worse but it is already history," said van Basten's former teammate at AC Milan.

"We made mistakes and paid for



Dutch model Sylvie van der Vaart, the wife of midfielder Rafael, watches proceedings from the stands during their game against Italy at Berne on Monday.



Portugal midfielder Deco passes the ball as his teammates carry out a CV session in the background during training at Neuchatel on Monday.