

Arrests after Swiss-Turkey match

AFP, Geneva

Swiss police made around 80 arrests late Wednesday following violent incidents between supporters after the Switzerland v Turkey match at the European Championships.

The co-hosts of Euro 2008 with Austria, Switzerland's tournament campaign was virtually ended by a 2-1 defeat to Turkey.

According to police sources on Thursday arrests were made in three separate locations -- in Aarau, Berne and Basel, the latter the host venue for the match.

In Aarau in the north of the country around 200 Swiss provoked scuffles with a group of nearly 400 Turkish fans who had been celebrating their team's win.

Over 200 police officers moved in and made 14 arrests.

In Berne, around 20 people were arrested after incidents between fans of both Turkey and Switzerland. Members of a right-wing extremist group also threw bottles at police, who responded by firing rubber bullets.

In Basel 25 fans of both teams were arrested after violent incidents erupted.

Benzema surprise for Van der Sar

INTERNET, undated

Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar was surprised to learn on Thursday that he was a boyhood idol of France striker Karim Benzema. Told that Benzema liked to play in goal as a youngster and pretend to be van der Sar, the veteran keeper admitted it was a question he hadn't seen coming.

"When I was a young boy I pretended to be Marco van Basten and I ended up being a goalkeeper," he said sitting next to the Dutch coach at a news conference in Lausanne.

"He (Benzema) did it the other way round. He is quick and strong and we will have to keep an eye on him," van der Sar said, describing the 20-year-old Lyon forward as a "quality striker."

Benzema played until the 78th minute in the 0-0 draw against Romania and may face the Dutch in their Group C game in Berne on Friday.

With the French striker being courted by Manchester United, there's a chance he could even be playing alongside the 37-year-old Dutch keeper at Old Trafford next season.

The Dutch captain was also put on the spot when asked to compare relative coaching newcomer van Basten with his experienced club manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

The keeper diplomatically steered around the question explaining all the pros and cons of club coaching, before adding: "What Ferguson has done with United is great. Van Basten has had three or four years as manager and will now be going to Ajax. And I think in a couple of years you can make the comparison better than now."

Having got out of that tight predicament, van der Sar was on more solid ground when outlining his thoughts on the current Dutch side.

The keeper was in the Dutch goal at the 1996, 2000 and 2004 Euro tournaments, and against Italy set a Dutch record of 14 European Championship matches.

Robben fit for today

AFP, Lausanne

Holland received a boost here Thursday when Arjen Robben received a clean bill of health ahead of Friday's Euro 2008 clash with France.

The Real Madrid wideman suffered a groin strain on Sunday on the eve of the Dutch's 3-0 demolition of world champions Italy.

But after Robben had trained with the rest of the squad coach Marco van Basten reported: "I'm very happy he's recovered sooner than expected. He trained this morning and is fit."

Van Basten, however, stressed that it was by no means certain Robben would figure against France in Berne.

With Robin van Persie, who has recovered from his thigh problem, also available van Basten smiled: "It's not easy bringing them back into a winning team but it's a luxury problem to have."

Two Dutch players who will not be available for selection Friday appear to be striker Klas-Jan Huntelaar, who is carrying a calf problem, and defender Mario Melchiot after the duo trained apart from the main group.

Holland are top of Group C after beating the Italians and a win against France would see the 1998 champions through to the quarter-finals.

Turkish tears for Swiss

AFP, Basel

Arda Turan ended Switzerland's interest in Euro 2008 in heartbreaking fashion by capping a man-of-the-match display with the stoppage time strike that gave Turkey a 2-1 win here on Wednesday.

Just as it seemed the co-hosts had done enough to stay alive in the competition, Arda broke clear on the left, cut inside and beat goalkeeper Diego Benaglio from the edge of the area with the help of a cruel deflection off the boot of centreback Patrick Muller.

It was harsh on the Swiss, who were left to count the cost of wasting the chances they had to kill off the Turks long before the dramatic denouement.

"It is a wonderful feeling," said

substitute Semih Senturk headed in an equaliser just before the hour mark.

"It is hard to find the words to say how terribly disappointed we are," Hakan said. "The weather played a role, it was a bit of a lottery in the first half and in the end the luckier of the two sides won."

Swiss boss Jakob Kuhn described his squad's exit as "painful."

"The disappointment is huge of course but I can't criticise anyone. The team played as well as they could and they lost two matches in a rather unfortunate way. I'm not saying we were better but we had the chances to score a second goal."

Portugal's victory over the Czechs earlier in the evening had

encounter. It was the Swiss who adapted better to the water-logged surface, thanks largely to the marshalling of Gokhan Inler.

The midfielder was first to test Volkan Demirel's handling, with a skidding long-range effort, and it was his crossfield pass that gave Hakan the opportunity to force the Turkish goalkeeper into a smart save at his near post.

Volkan also did well to keep out Tranquillo Barnetta's free-kick before Arda struck the woodwork at the other end, although the Turkish midfielder knew little about it as Diego Benaglio's punched clearance from Nihat Kahveci's free-kick rebounded off his head and against the post.

With just over half an hour gone, the direct Swiss approach paid off. Philippe Senderos's punt landed in the Turkish box and with the sudden turf stopping the ball, Derdiyok was able to skip round the outrushing Volkan and square across the saturated goalmouth for Hakan to tap in at the back post.

Three minutes later, Hakan was guilty of the miss of the tournament after Valon Behrami's low cross from the right found him in an almost identical position. Astonishingly, the most technically gifted player on the pitch contrived to slice the ball wide from three yards out.

Such a flagrant miss was always like to prove costly and Turkey, who switched to a three-man forward line with the introduction of Semih at the break, capitalised on the let-off 11 minutes into the second half.

Nihat swung in a cross from the left and Semih rose unchallenged to head the ball past Benaglio from close range.

With seven minutes left, Hakan had another clear sight of goal but side-footed straight at Volkan and, with the hosts straining for the winner, it was Turkey who were to make their superior finishing count at the death.

TODAY'S MATCHES		
Teams	Time	Venue
Italy v Romania	10:00pm	Zurich
Netherlands v France	12:45am (Saturday)	Berne

delighted Turkey coach Fatih Terim. "The players needed this for their confidence and I congratulate them on their incredible effort."

Turkey can now join Group A leaders Portugal in the quarterfinals by beating the Czech Republic in their final game and Fathi added: "This win has given us a lot of confidence for the last game. Today is the beginning of the Euro tour."

"It was not easy, the conditions were difficult and Switzerland are a very strong team, playing at home. So was an important win."

Hakan Yakin, one of three players in the Swiss side with family roots in Turkey, had given Jakob Kuhn's side a first-half lead.

But the veteran playmaker also wasted two glorious chances to claim a second goal for his side, who were pegged back when sub-

simplified matters for the Swiss, who kicked off knowing defeat would mean the end of their tournament.

Injury had taken its toll on both sides, with the co-hosts deprived of captain and leading goalscorer Alexander Frei and his usual strike partner, Marco Streller, with the result that Hakan was partnered in attack by the 19-year-old Eren Derdiyok.

Turkey were missing regular captain Emre Belozoglu and key defender Gokhan Zan for what was the first meeting between the two countries since their play-off for a place at the last World Cup ended in a mass brawl.

The pre-match suggestions that that was all water under the bridge was belied by the ferocity of the early exchanges but a torrential downpour drew the sting from the

Czech's remain confident

AFP, Geneva

Czech coach Karel Bruckner said his side still have everything to play for ahead of their do-or-die clash with Turkey on Sunday with a place in the Euro 2008 quarterfinals up for grabs.

The Czech Republic were soundly beaten 3-1 by Cristiano Ronaldo-inspired Portugal at the Stade de Geneve on Wednesday night, but a win over Turkey back here on Sunday would still give them a place in the last eight.

As the Czechs beat co-hosts Switzerland 1-0 last Saturday and Turkey also picked up a 2-1 win over the Swiss on Wednesday, Sunday's match means the winner

are set to finish as Group A runners-up to Portugal while the losers go home.

"We aren't out of it yet and we still have everything to play for," said Bruckner.

"We still have a third match and I can promise we will be ready for that." Having started the game with towering veteran striker Jan Koller and Hamburg midfielder David Jarolim on the bench, Bruckner praised their replacements.

He said: "I made two changes to the team who beat Switzerland and took a pragmatic decision."

"We had two new players and I thought they performed really well." Jaroslav Plasil was immense as was Milan Baros.

"Some players certainly did

better in this match than in the Swiss game but if we're honest, we came up against a stronger side."

"I thought in the first half we proved we are a great team in both defence and attack."

"We had more chances to score than we did in the Swiss game and played some very good football at times."

But Bruckner had the good grace to heap praise on an impressive Portuguese side who are playing with confidence and are now widely regarded as one of the tournaments co-favourites alongside Germany, Spain and the Netherlands.

"I would like to congratulate Portugal on their display and their win - they played very well."

ITALY V ROMANIA

Azzurri look to history

AFP, Zurich

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni is counting on history repeating itself as his embattled squad fight for Euro 2008 survival against Romania here on Friday.

The Italians have a good record of recovering from sluggish starts and ensuring they reach a peak towards the business end of major tournaments.

Never before have they had to bounce back for a setback quite as traumatic as Monday night's 3-0 demolition by Holland. But Donadoni was quick to remind his critics that, as a player, he was part of a squad who suffered a shock defeat by Ireland in their opening match at the 1994 World Cup before ultimately only losing the final on penalties.

"We got out of that situation in America in the only way you can -- by working hard, having the desire to hit back and understanding the mistakes that you've made," the former AC Milan midfielder recalled.

Despite his defiant insistence that the defeat by the Dutch was just one of those nights when everything that could go wrong did, Donadoni is expected to take his selection's scalpel to the Italian line-up with almost half the side that started on Monday facing relegation to the bench.

Although the left-sided forward Antonio di Natale was Italy's brightest performer in the first hour of Monday's match, their cutting edge was far sharper once he had been replaced by Alessandro del Piero and the other two substitutes, Antonio Cassano and Fabio Grosso, also made a strong case for promotion.



Romania captain Cristian Chivu controls the ball during a training session in St. Gallen on Thursday.

injured captain Fabio Cannavaro means changes in defence are certain with Juventus centreback Giorgio Chiellini expected to come in and Grosso tipped to start at left-back.

Romania have been widely written off as no-hopers in group C but the reality is that, during their qualifying campaign, Victor Piturca's squad took four points out of a possible six over the same Dutch side that took the Italians apart.

"If Italy lost to the Netherlands - it shows they can be beaten," argued Daniel Niculae, the Auxerre striker who partnered Adrian Mutu in attack for the Romanians in their goalless draw with France.



Turkish midfielder Arda Turan celebrates after scoring the winning goal against Switzerland during the Euro 2008 match in Basel on Wednesday.

I lead like Zidane: Ballack

AFP, Berlin

German star Michael Ballack has compared his role with Die Mannschaft with that of former French maestro Zinedine Zidane, saying he sees himself as a leader on the field regardless of his official status as skipper.

"Even if I am someone who never asked to take the skipper's armband that does not mean that it is a role I did not want to assume," Ballack said in an interview published Thursday by Tagesspiegel newspaper.

"I carry out this role in a calm manner -- Zinedine Zidane did the same thing. He was the leader of his team simply by dint of his class and his manner of playing," said Chelsea star Ballack, who has been captain since 2004.

Ballack, 31, hinted he would also like to coach the Germans one day.

"It's a post linked in with one's capacity to lead and to take decisions. However, this post has rarely gone to the person who has put forward his candidature well in advance," he added, citing the examples of former skippers Rudi Voeller and Jurgen Klinsmann, who took the helm of the national side "without ever having thought of taking on the job."

Frei facing surgery

AFP, Feusisberg

Switzerland captain Alexander Frei faces surgery for the knee ligament tear which prematurely ended his involvement in Euro 2008, team doctor Cuno Wetzel said Thursday.

The Borussia Dortmund striker suffered the injury in the opening Group A match last Saturday, a 1-0 defeat by the Czech Republic.

"He probably faces surgery," said Wetzel of Switzerland's star player, who has scored 35 goals in 60 internationals to be the leading scorer in Switzerland's history.

"He is doing okay (but) we have detected a certain instability" regarding the knee, Wetzel said.

"We have spoken to his club doctors and undertaken further tests with a knee specialist in Germany," he added.

"There are several possibilities. It will probably be necessary to carry out a little surgery."

Frei's loss has been compounded by form and fitness problems with his regular strike partner, Marco Streller, who Wetzel said also potentially faced surgery for a suspected hernia.

The Swiss bowed out of the Euro after they went down 2-1 to Turkey on Wednesday in Basel.

Atypical Domenech

AFP, Chatel-Saint-Denis

Raymond Domenech is a man for whom the expression 'likes to play his cards close to his chest' was made.

A straightforward question will often illicit a reply that is an answer in name only.

A typical example was his handling of the inquiry before Monday's Euro 2008 opener with Romania concerning the availability after a minor injury of star striker Thierry Henry.

Journalist: "Raymond, will Thierry play in Zurich?" Domenech: "He might, or he might not."

Mmmm, thanks a lot, that clears things up nicely.

On Wednesday, however, he lifted his habitual guard with the media, even it seems surprising himself with his frankness when divulging that he could make as many as four changes to the side that must confront the freescoring

Group C leaders Holland in Berne on Friday.

"For once, I will be honest and tell you that I'm hesitating over four positions."

That inevitably raised a follow up inquiry -- namely 'is Patrick Vieira in your calculations?' but by then the guard was back in place and he playfully scolded the journalist, telling him: "Now you're going too far!"

Both captain Vieira and Henry saw out Tuesday's 45 minute game against a local side without mishap, Henry making four decent passes and scoring a goal.

A fully fit Barcelona forward could only be a benefit against the Dutch after Nicolas Anelka and the inexperienced Karim Benzema failed to cut the mustard in the goalless draw against the Romanians.

There's been a lot of talk around the French camp about whether Domenech will give the in-form Manchester United defender

C'Ron aiming for glory

AFP, Geneva

Portugal are daring to dream of Euro 2008 glory after their impressive 3-1 win over the Czech Republic, team hero Cristiano Ronaldo said.

The 23-year-old winger showed exactly why Manchester United are fighting to keep him out of Real Madrid's clutches by creating two goals and scoring one against the Czechs on Wednesday.

Having drawn Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech out of position in the eighth minute, Ronaldo created enough space for Barcelona's Deco to flick the ball home and then followed up with a precision strike of his own on 63 minutes.

He capped a man-of-the-match performance by setting up Portuguese substitute Ricardo Quaresma to score a third goal in extra-time.

With a maximum six points after two wins, Portugal look set to reach the Euro 2008 quarterfinals as Group A winners and Ronaldo believes his side can go one better than four years ago when they lost to Greece in the final.

"Can the Portuguese dream? We can all dream, we are starting to have the belief to dream high, but we must take it a step at a time," said the Portuguese star, whose side face Switzerland on Sunday in their final Group A game.

"The road is long, but we are on track."

Ronaldo said he makes no excuses for his high-risk football which paid off against the Czech Republic in such dramatic style.

He said: "I try to always give my best."

"Sometimes people do not understand, but it's the same game I play for Manchester and that is how I will always play."

"I do not know play differently. I only know risk."

"When things go badly I miss balls, but when things go well I score goals or create them."

"In the second-half (against the Czech Republic) things went better me, I managed to make a goal, it was good."

"But the group is not over for us, we still have one more match to play."

NETHERLANDS V FRANCE

Les Blues up against it

REUTERS, Vevey

France need to wake up from a dismal start to avoid being overrun by a confident Dutch side in their second Euro 2008 game on Friday in Berne.

While Netherlands opened their Group C campaign with a 3-0 demolition of world champions Italy with a fluency as potent as the total football they invented in the 1970s, France had just one shot on target in a dull 0-0 draw with Romania.

The 2006 World Cup runners-up, who share Italy's tactical, defensive approach, desperately need a touch of flair to avoid suffering the same fate as their Latin rivals.

"Maybe we must change our playing style and opt for a quick passing game to destabilise our opponents," France defender William Gallas told reporters.

"It's important to defend well and not to concede any goals but we must accelerate a bit," he added. "We need points, we need to win and to do that we need to take more risks."

A draw would place France in an uncomfortable situation before facing Italy in their final group game while a defeat would leave them on the verge of an embarrassing early exit.

The Dutch, by contrast, just have to repeat their performance against Italy to make sure of a place in the quarterfinals.

They realise, however, that they are nowhere yet.



Dutch star Rafael van der Vaart laughs as he carries a pair of footballs during a training session in Lausanne on Thursday.