

England, Spain cruise

AFP, Paris



England qualified for the 2010 World Cup finals in style on Wednesday thrashing Euro 2008 nemesis Croatia 5-1 at Wembley and were later joined by European champions Spain who easily beat Estonia 3-0. England had enjoyed one of their worst moments two years ago when beaten by the Croats at Wembley which saw them lose out on the Euro 2008 finals at their rivals expense. But Italian Fabio Capello has rebuilt their morale and self-belief to such an extent they totally outclassed pretty much the same Croat side. Capello was delighted with the performance and the outcome. "The spirit of the group, the concentration in every moment of the game, the players helping each other, the movement when the ball was with the opponents and when we had it - I was very happy with everything," purred the stylish Italian. Capello's satisfaction at qualifying was hardly mirrored by his Spanish counterpart, the lugubrious Vicente Del Bosque despite it being eight wins from eight. "It wasn't our best game tonight but we have qualified for the World Cup and that is the main thing," said the former Real Madrid coach. "We are not thinking about the World Cup just yet. We just have to prepare for the next few games which we want to win and continue our momentum." Elsewhere, 2006 World Cup finalists France and the team they beat in the

semifinals Portugal looked to be on safer ground for qualifying as the French drew 1-1 away at Group Seven leaders Serbia despite playing most of the match down with 10 players - goalkeeper Hugo Lloris getting his marching orders. Portugal gained a much needed victory over Hungary in Budapest with Pepe getting their goal in the ninth minute - and putting them in even with a chance of winning Group One with two matches remaining. The Group Four dogfight between 2006 semifinalists Germany and Euro 2008 semifinalists Russia is all set for a mouthwatering potential tabletopping decider in Moscow on October 10 after both were comfortable winners. Germany took care of Azerbaijan as expected with a 4-0 win - Miroslav Klose scoring a brace - while Russia were briefly drawing 1-1 with Wales before running out 3-1 winners in Cardiff to remain a point behind the Germans. World champions Italy took a giant step towards South Africa beating Bulgaria 2-0. Fabio Grosso, who scored the winning penalty in the 2006 shootout, got their first goal with the result also doing second-placed Republic of Ireland a huge favour as they lead the Bulgarians by five points for the runners-up spot. England's joy will be Croatia's pain and they are not even assured of securing second place and a play-off place as Ukraine drew 0-0 with Belarus and are now two points behind the Croats but with two games to play. Croatia have just one match left. France's result relied on a gutsy effort in the hostile atmosphere of the

Marakana Stadium in Belgrade as captain Thierry Henry levelled in the first-half with his 50th international goal in reply to Nenad Milijas' ninth-minute penalty. Under-fire French coach Raymond Domenech was justifiably proud of his team, though, Serbia still remain in the box seat as they require three points from the last two matches to progress as group winners. "I'm proud of everything about the match," said France coach Domenech. "I'm happy for the people who believed in us and supported us. I still believe and it's not over. I will congratulate my players." France, though, are four points clear in second of Austria, who drew 1-1 away in Romania, whose desperate home form has cost them dearly with just two points from a possible 12 this campaign. Portugal may still be outside the top two but Denmark being held 1-1 in Albania and Sweden beating Malta, only thanks to an 81st minute own-goal, sees them just two points off second and five off the Danes with two games to go. Slovakia look the likeliest winners of Group Three as they won 2-0 in impressive style in Northern Ireland meaning their neighbours the Czech Republic can only hope at best for the runners-up spot. The Czechs won 7-0 at home to minnows San Marino but it was more memorable for the return of playmaker Tomas Rosicky after 20 months out with injury. Armenia grabbed their first win of the campaign beating former European finalists and 1986 World Cup semifinalists Belgium 2-1 in Yerevan in Group Five leading to the resignation of coach Frankie Vercauteren.



PHOTO: AFP

Italy defender Fabio Grosso celebrates scoring the opening goal against Bulgaria during their 2010 World Cup qualifier in Turin on Wednesday.

EURO ZONE 2010WC QUALIFIER RESULTS

AFP, Paris

Collated results of 2010 World Cup European Zone qualifiers on Wednesday: **Group One** Malta 0 Sweden 1 (Azzopardi 81-og) Albania 1 (Bogdani 51) Denmark 1 (Bendtner 40) Hungary 0 Portugal 1 (Pepe 9) **Group Two** Israel 7 (Barda 9, 21, 44, Brochyan 15, Golan 58, Sahar 63, 84) Luxembourg 0 Latvia 2 (Cauna 62, Astafjevs 75) Switzerland 2 (Frei 43, Derdiyok 80) Moldova 1 (Andronic 90) Greece 1 (Gekas 33) **Group Three** Czech Republic 7 (Baros 28, 44, 45+3-pen, 66, Sverkos 47, 90+5, Necid 86) San Marino 0 Slovenia 3 (Dedic 13, Novakovic 45, Birsca 63) Poland 0 Northern Ireland 0 Slovakia 2 (Sestak 15, Holosko 66) **Group Four** Liechtenstein 1 (Polverino 75) Finland 1 (Litmanen 73-pen) Germany 4 (Ballack 14-pen, Klose 55, 66, Podolski 71) Azerbaijan 0 Wales 1 (Collins 54) Russia 3 (Semshov 36, Ignashevich 71, Pavlyuchenko 90) **Group Five** Armenia 2 (Goaryan 23, Ovspeyan 50) Belgium 1 (Van Buyten 90+2) Bosnia-Herzegovina 1 (Salihovic 25) Turkey 1 (Belozoglu 4) Spain 3 (Fabregas 33, Cazorla 82, Mata 90+3) Estonia 0 **Group Six** Belarus 0 Ukraine 0 Andorra 1 (Sonejee 69) Kazakhstan 3 (Hizhnicenko 14, 34, Batiyev 28) England 5 (Lampard 7-pen, 59, Gerrard 18, 66, Rooney 78) Croatia 1 (Eduardo 73) **Group Seven** Romania 1 (Bucur 54) Austria 1 (Schiemer 82) Faroe Islands 2 (S. Olsen 15, Hansen 35) Lithuania 1 (Danilevicius 23) Serbia 1 (Milijas 13-pen) France 1 (Henry 31) **Group Eight** Montenegro 1 (Vucinic 57-pen) Cyprus 1 (Okkas 64) Italy 2 (Grosso 11, Iaquinata 40) Bulgaria 0 **Group Nine** Scotland 0 Holland 1 (Elia 84) Norway 2 (Helstad 2, Risse 26) Macedonia 1 (Grncarov 79)

Bahrain stun Saudis

AFP, Riyadh



Bahrain stayed on course for a maiden World Cup berth after edging out neighbours Saudi Arabia on the away-goals rule following a 2-2 draw in a heart-stopping second-leg of the Asian Zone World Cup qualifying play-off on Wednesday. Two headed goals in injury time was a perfect climax to this eagerly awaited and extraordinary clash. Nassir Al Shamrani put the hosts ahead in the 13th minute while Jaycee John equalised for the visitors in the 42nd. Hamad Al Montashari put Saudi Arabia, who had reached the last four World Cup finals, ahead in the first minute of injury time while Bahrain's substitute Ismail Abdullatif headed in the all-important goal to seal the hosts' fate. Bahrain, who let Saudi Arabia off the hook in the first-leg in Manama which ended 0-0 on Saturday, will now clash with Oceania champions New Zealand in another play-off for a place in the finals in South Africa. Saudi Arabia dominated the proceedings on Wednesday right from the beginning and deservedly went ahead following a well-orchestrated move which foxed the entire Bahrain defence. Mohammed Noor created the chance with a good pass from the left and Al Shamrani was in the right place at the right time to open the scoring. The Saudis could have doubled the lead in the next few minutes with top striker Yasser Al Kahtani, Noor and Al Shamrani making repeated inroads into the Bahrain penalty area. But the Bahrain defence absorbed the pressure and even kept pushing forward with their

trademark long passes or swift counterattacks. Bahrain's patience and perseverance finally paid off three minutes from half-time with Abdullah Omar initiating the move from the right. The pacy midfielder sent in a measured effort in the 79th minute but Saudi goalkeeper Waleed Abdulla pulled off another acrobatic save. At the other end, it was Al Kahtani and Al Shamrani who battled it out for the Saudis. The match took another dramatic turn in the first minute of injury time when Al Montashari leapt high amidst a melee to put Saudis ahead and seemingly on way to the playoff with New Zealand. But Bahrain regrouped in double quick time and were back on even terms even before the celebrations in the Saudi stands had begun to ebb. In what looked like a final move of the match, Salman Isa's corner kick was perfectly met by Abdullatif and this time his header succeeded in beating Saudi goalkeeper Abdulla. Four years ago, Bahrain had reached the same stage and were 90 minutes away from sealing a berth in the 2006 World Cup held in Germany. They drew 1-1 away to Trinidad and Tobago in the first-leg of a playoff only to lose in front of their home fans in the second-leg. Czech coach Milan Macala's team will now be looking forward to bettering that result and realising a long-cherished dream of playing at the highest level for the first time in their history.

Press hail English

AFP, London



England's convincing qualification for the 2010 World Cup finals in South Africa had the headline writers reaching for the puns Thursday, with the Sun urging readers to "Get De Beers in". The tabloid's reference to the South African diamond mining giant was splashed across its front page, below a photograph of Steven Gerrard celebrating one of two his goals in the 5-1 thrashing of Croatia on Wednesday. The Sun topped off the page with a list of well-known South Africans, led off by Nelson Mandela but also including wildebeest, giraffes, and, in the paper's typically blunt style, "that girl runner who looks like a bloke". Not to be outdone, the Mirror's front-page proclaimed "Bok of the net". England's win was all the sweeter because it came against the country that thwarted its hopes of qualifying for the Euro 2008 finals. "We owed you that," said another Sun headline. Steve McClaren was in charge of England when the defeat to Croatia two years ago blocked his team's passage to the European

Championships in a stinging setback as the powerless coach sheltered from the driving rain. The Daily Telegraph reflected that the decision to install Italian coach Fabio Capello, who has a track record of winning trophies in club football, had borne fruit. "What a difference a good manager makes," the paper said. "As Fabio Capello masterminded the destruction of Croatia, as the champagne corks popped as Wembley crowed its delight at reaching the 2010 World Cup, the memory of Steve McClaren clutching his umbrella as Slaven Bilic's side won here two years ago was confined to history." The Guardian also noticed a sea change in England's attitude since Capello took over. "Last night's result was a triumph built on strength of purpose," it noted. And it said the emphatic manner of the qualification suggested that this time England will be leaving nothing to chance: "Complacency, their besetting sin in recent years, may be finally be a thing of the past." The Times pointed out that "even the normally reserved" Capello was confident that England, after consistently under-performing in major tournaments, could win the world crown for the first time since 1966.

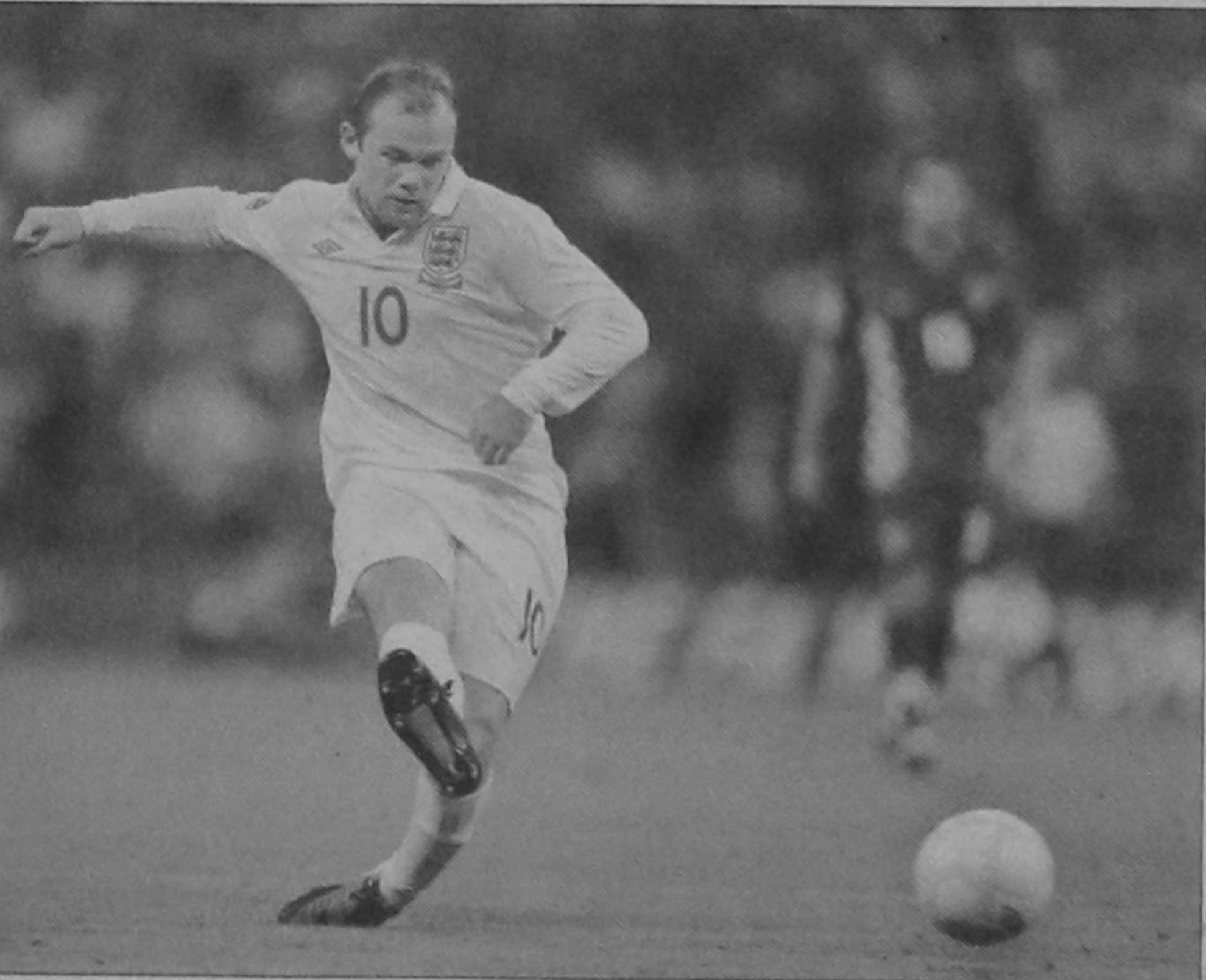


PHOTO: AFP

England striker Wayne Rooney shoots to score the fifth goal during their 2010 World Cup qualifier against Croatia at Wembley on Wednesday.

IN BRIEF

Forlan to sign new deal

AFP, Madrid

Uruguayan striker Diego Forlan, the top scorer in the Spanish league last season, is to sign a new contract with Atletico Madrid that will keep him at the club until 2013, Spanish radio said. The deal, reached after three months of difficult negotiations, will extend his current contract by two years, Radio Cadena Ser reported late Wednesday. It said the buyout clause remains at 36 million euros. The sports newspaper AS said his salary will be around five million euros a year, the same as Atletico's other star striker, Argentine Sergio "Kun" Aguero. The 30-year-old one-time Manchester United player joined Atletico in 2007 from Villarreal for 21 million euros. He scored 32 goals for Atletico last season, which made him the top scorer, or "pichichi", in the Primera Liga and won him the European Golden Boot award for the second time. Since then, he has sparked interest from both Spanish champions Barcelona and big-spending Real Madrid, which reportedly put in an offer for him.

Ramos to replace Zico at CSKA

AFP, Moscow

Former Real Madrid manager Juande Ramos has agreed to replace Brazilian Zico as coach of CSKA Moscow, the Spaniard said Thursday. "I love new challenges. We are looking forward to helping the team realise their potential in Europe, and working really hard over the next three months," Ramos said on his website, www.juanderamos.com. Ramos stroke the deal with the Red Army side until the end of the country's football season in November, according to reports. No financial details of the contract were disclosed. Reports also said that Ramos' main task would be reaching the play-off stage of the Champions League with Russia's three-time champions. CSKA are in the Group B with Manchester United, Turkish side Besiktas and German champions Wolfsburg. The deal would be extended should Ramos lead CSKA into the knockout round of the Champions League. Ramos will be accompanied by fitness coach Marco Alvarez, who has formed part of the 54-year-old manager's coaching squad since 2003-04 when he signed for Malaga.

STANDINGS

European qualifying zone World Cup standings after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points)

Group One

Denmark	8	5	3	0	15	4	18
Sweden	8	4	3	1	9	3	15
Portugal	8	3	4	1	10	5	13
Hungary	8	4	1	3	9	5	13
Albania	9	1	4	4	5	9	7
Malta	9	0	1	8	0	22	1

Group Two

Switzerland	8	5	2	1	15	8	17
Greece	8	4	2	2	13	7	14
Latvia	8	4	2	2	13	8	14
Israel	8	3	3	2	17	9	12
Luxembourg	8	1	2	5	3	20	5
Moldova	8	0	3	5	3	12	3

Group Three

Slovakia	8	6	1	1	21	8	19
Slovenia	8	4	2	2	13	4	14
N Ireland	9	4	2	3	13	9	14
Czech Rep	8	3	3	2	15	6	12
Poland	8	3	2	3	19	11	11
San Marino	9	0	0	9	1	44	0

Group Four

Germany	8	7	1	0	24	4	22
Russia	8	7	0	1	18	4	21
Finland	8	4	2	2	11	12	14
Wales	8	3	0	5	6	10	9
Liechtenstein	8	0	2	6	2	19	2
Azerbaijan	8	0	1	7	1	13	1

Group Five

Spain	8	8	0	0	21	2	24 - qualified
Bosnia-Herze	8	5	1	2	21	8	16
Turkey	8	3	3	2	11	8	12
Belgium	8	2	1	5	11	18	7
Estonia	8	1	2	5	7	22	5
Armenia	8	1	1	6	5	18	4

Group Six

England	8	8	0	0	31	5	24 - qualified
Croatia	9	5	2	2	17	12	17
Ukraine	8	4	3	1	14	6	15
Belarus	8	3	1	4	15	11	10
Kazakhstan	8	2	0	6	10	23	6
Andorra	9	0	0	9	3	33	0

Group Seven

Serbia	8	6	1	1	16	6	19
France	8	4	3	1	10	8	15
Austria	8	3	2	3	11	11	11
Lithuania	8	3	0	5	7	8	9
Romania	8	2	3	3	9	12	9
Faroe Islands	8	1	1	6	4	12	4

Group Eight

Italy	8	6	2	0	13	3	20
Ireland	8	4	4	0	10	6	16
Bulgaria	8	2	5	1	10	7	11
Cyprus	8	1	3	4	8	12	6
Montenegro	8	0	5	3	7	13	5
Georgia	8	0	3	5	4	11	3

Group Nine

Netherlands	8	8	0	0	17	2	24 - qualified
Norway	8	2	4	2	9	7	10
Scotland	8	3	1	4	6	11	10
Macedonia	8	2	1	5	5	11	7
Iceland	8	1	2	5	7	13	5