



Germany striker Miroslav Klose celebrates his strike in their crunch World Cup qualifying clash against Russia at the Luzhniki stadium in Moscow on Saturday. Klose's goal was the difference as Germany held on for a win to confirm their berth in South Africa for 2010.

EUROPEAN ZONE Italy, Germany thru'

AFP, Paris



Italy scraped a draw against the Republic of Ireland to join Germany, Denmark and Serbia as the latest teams to secure 2010 World Cup places on a dramatic penultimate batch of qualifiers on Saturday.

This quartet join already-qualified England, Spain and the Netherlands, leaving two automatic berths from the continent still up for grabs heading into Wednesday's last throw of the South Africa dice.

Russia, beaten 1-0 by ten-man Germany in Moscow, and the Republic of Ireland, are among the teams assured of places in November's two-leg play-offs.

France, beaten on penalties in the 2006 final by Italy, are also in the play-offs after routing part-timers the Faroe Islands 5-0 to book second place in Group Seven behind Serbia, who trounced Romania by the same scoreline.

The Irish came desperately close to pulling off a major upset in Dublin as Sean St Ledger headed them into a 2-1 lead with only three minutes to go, only for Alberto Gilardino to level on the whistle.

That put the world champions into an unassailable lead in Group Eight with Ireland as runners-up.

Italy coach Marcello Lippi praised the Azzurri's "great performance".

He added: "If we had lost it would have been a big injustice because we played with passion, character and enthusiasm."

Gilardino predicted Italy could go all the way again in 2010.

"We struggled but the result is even better for that. At the end we deserved the draw," the Fiorentina striker said. "We can hope to go all the way, the basis of this squad is the same as the one that won in 2006 but we've added some young players and some good players."

"Now we'll go to South Africa in good spirits and with hope to win it again."

Earlier, three-time world champions Germany ensured their participation in next year's World Cup with a game to spare after a gritty defeat of Guus Hiddink's Russia.

Miroslav Klose's first-half goal booked Germany's ticket with Joachim Loew's team reduced to ten men when Jerome Boateng was sent packing after receiving a second yellow card with 20 minutes remaining.

The win gave secured top spot for Germany in Group Four ahead of their final qualifier against Finland in Hamburg.

Loew reflected: "The team did well. We needed a bit of luck, but we have made sure of qualifying for the World Cup and you can task for more."

Goal-hero Klose added: "We dealt well with the pressure here - it was not an easy place to play."

Hiddink said: "We cannot be happy with the result of course, but the team showed character in the second half."

"We were not good enough

Spain, who had already guaranteed their place in South Africa as winners of Group Five, came through their trip to Armenia with a 2-1 win to extend their unbeaten run to nine from nine qualifiers.

Bosnia-Herzegovina secured a play-off berth with a 2-0 win in Estonia to make sure of their position as runners-up to the Euro 2008 champions.

In other action, Switzerland boosted their

STANDINGS

GROUP ONE	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts	
Denmark	9	6	3	0	16	4	21	-qualified
Portugal	9	4	4	1	13	5	16	
Sweden	9	4	3	2	9	4	15	
Hungary	9	4	1	4	9	8	13	
Albania	9	1	4	4	5	9	7	
Malta	9	0	1	8	0	22	1	
GROUP FOUR								
Germany	9	8	1	0	25	4	25	-qualified
Russia	9	7	0	2	18	5	21	-play-offs
Finland	9	5	2	2	13	13	17	
Wales	9	3	0	6	7	12	9	
Azerbaijan	9	1	1	7	3	13	4	
Liechtenstein	9	0	2	7	2	21	2	
GROUP SEVEN								
Serbia	9	7	1	1	21	6	22	-qualified
France	9	5	3	1	15	8	18	-play-offs
Austria	9	4	2	3	13	12	14	
Lithuania	9	3	0	6	8	10	9	
Romania	9	2	3	4	9	17	9	
Faroe Islands	9	1	1	7	4	17	4	
GROUP EIGHT								
Italy	9	6	3	0	15	5	21	-qualified
Ireland	9	4	5	0	12	8	17	-play-offs
Bulgaria	9	2	5	2	11	11	11	
Cyprus	9	2	3	4	12	13	9	
Montenegro	9	1	5	3	9	14	8	

IN BRIEF

Ronaldo out for two weeks

INTERNET, undated

Cristiano Ronaldo will be out of action for around two weeks, according to Portuguese and Spanish press reports on Monday. The world's most expensive player aggravated his twisted right ankle in Portugal's 3-0 thrashing of Olympique Marseille on September 30. He then missed Real's 2-1 defeat away to Sevilla on October 4.

Ronaldo originally twisted the ankle in Real Madrid's 3-0 Champions League defeat of Olympique Marseille on September 30. He then missed Real's 2-1 defeat away to Sevilla on October 4. The medical staff of the Portuguese football federation will carry out a rigorous examination of the ankle later on Sunday.

He will certainly miss Portugal's last World Cup qualifying game at home to Malta on Wednesday, which Carlos Queiroz' team need to win in order to finish second in Group I - and thus qualify for the play-offs.

According to sports daily AS on Sunday, Cristiano has asked Real to permit him to stay with the Portuguese squad until Thursday, instead of returning immediately to Madrid for treatment.

Rival daily Marca, for its part, quotes Henrique Jones, the head doctor of the Portuguese squad as denying that Cristiano should have missed the Hungary match. "There was no risk," said Jones. "He was in condition to play, though now he is in a lot of pain."

Ronaldo left Lisbon's Estadio da Luz limping, without talking to the media.

Big bonus for Germans

INTERNET, Mainz

The German football association is to pay out a bonus of over four million Euros to national team players after the team qualified for the World Cup finals on Saturday.

Germany's 1-0 victory against Russia in a Group 5 match gave the three-times world champions an unassailable four-point lead from the Russians, who now will have to qualify via the play-offs.

Each player is to receive 20,000 Euros per call-up for a World Cup qualifier, with the total believed to be 4.08 million Euros.

Bayern Munich's Philipp Lahm, Bastian Schweinsteiger and Mario Gomez, as well as VfB Stuttgart's Thomas Hitzlsperger, SV Hamburg's Piotr Trochowski and Schalke 04's Heiko Westermann are to receive the maximum amount of 200,000 Euros.

Werder Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese, who did not play a single game during the qualifiers, is to receive 180,000 Euros after being called-up for nine matches.

AFRICA ZONE

Ivory Coast into finals

AFP, Johannesburg



Ivory Coast qualified for the 2010 World Cup by drawing 1-1 in Malawi on Saturday and Cameroon moved closer to joining them with a 3-0 triumph over Togo.

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba scored just 120 seconds after coming on in the second half to give the Ivorian 'Elephants' an unassailable seven-point Group E advantage.

The visitors had been rocked midway through the second half at Kamuzu Stadium in Blantyre when Jacob Ngvira scored his first World Cup goal to put the 'Flames' ahead.

Bosnia-born Ivory Coast coach Vahid Halilhodzic responded by sending on Drogba to score the goal that took the cocoa-producing west African country into a second consecutive World Cup tournament.

Ivory Coast have 13 points, Burkina Faso six, Malawi four and Guinea three and attention now turns to who will finish second and third after the final fixtures next month and qualify for the 2010 African Nations Cup in Angola.

The 'Elephants' made an honourable first-round exit in Germany three years ago, losing narrowly to Argentina and the Netherlands before finishing with a win over Serbia-Montenegro.

England coach Fabio Capello says Ivory Coast are capable of going far in South Africa next year while Chelsea boss Carlos Ancelotti claims he would coach them for free at the finals, much to the annoyance of Halilhodzic.

Apart from talismanic Drogba, Ivory Coast also started with Barcelona

midfield enforcer Yaya Toure on the bench while an injury ruled out his older brother, Manchester City defender Kolo.

Resurgent Cameroon stayed top of Group A after outclassing shock 2006 qualifiers Togo in Yaounde while Gabon stayed one point adrift after beating Morocco 3-1 in Libreville.

Midfielder Geremi Njitap scored at the second attempt off a penalty to give the 'Indomitable Lions' a half-time advantage against Togolese opponents led by reigning African Footballer of the Year Emmanuel Adebayor.

But the Manchester City striker was substituted 15 minutes into the second half after goals from Jean Makoun and Achille Emana had given Cameroon a 3-0 cushion.

Makoun netted off a pass from Inter Milan striker Samuel Eto'o, who dribbled past four defenders, and Emana beat overworked goalkeeper Kodjovi Obilale

with a low drive.

A Cameroon side transformed by the mid-year arrival of French coach Paul Le Guen have 10 points, Gabon nine, Togo five and Morocco three and the Lions cannot be overtaken if they triumph on November 14 in Rabat.

Hicham Mahdoui conceded an own goal on the stroke of half-time, to give Gabon a lead they stretched during the second half through Eric Mouloungou and Daniel Cousin before Adel Taarabt snatched a late consolation goal.

Egypt kept alive hopes of overtaking Group C pacesetters Algeria with a fortunate 1-0 victory in Zambia courtesy of a mid-second half strike from midfielder Hosny Abd Rabou.

Algeria (plus five) lead Egypt (plus three) on goal difference and will regain a three-point advantage if they defeat bottom-of-the-table Rwanda in Blida Sunday.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Ivory Coast captain Didier Drogba points to his name after scoring a goal against Malawi in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday. Drogba's goal sent his team into the finals of the World Cup in South Africa.

Bahrain held by NZ

AFP, Manama



New Zealand held an unrelenting but distinctly unlucky Bahrain to a goalless draw in the first-leg of the 2010 World Cup Asia/Oceania play-off in Manama on Saturday.

Bahrain missed at least four clear chances of scoring while the Kiwis defended stoutly and emerged unscathed with their goalkeeper Mark Paston the hero of the evening.

Bahrain enjoyed better ball possession, dictated the pace of the match but could not find the target to give meaning to their overall domination.

The second-leg is scheduled for November 14 in Wellington with the winner booking a berth for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

New Zealand last competed in a World Cup way back in 1982 with their present coach Ricki Herbert a member of that team while Bahrain are yet to play in the soccer showpiece event.

realistic attempt at goal for Bahrain in the 20th minute from about 15 metres outside the penalty area but his shot lacked direction.

Four minutes later Hussain Ali made good use of a through pass in the penalty area and though he beat defender Ben Sigmund by going around him, the delay in taking a shot at goal cost him dearly.

Australian A-League top scorer Shane Smeltz and Celtic's Chris Killen spearheaded most of the All Whites' moves with captain Ryan Nelsen overlapping the midfielders and supplying most of the passes.

But time and again the duo found the Bahrain defenders, the tall Sayed Mohammed Adnan and Hussain Baba in particular, hard to beat.

The unfamiliar and unforgiving hot and humid weather conditions, with the apparent temperature hovering close to 40 degree Celsius, also took an early toll on the visitors, who though taller and stronger than their Bahraini rivals clearly struggled to keep pace.

Bahrain came close to scoring twice within the first 20 minutes of the second-half. First striker Salman Isa shot into the hands of Kiwi goalkeeper Paston after receiving a fine headed pass into the penalty area from captain

CONCACAF

Mexico, USA into WC finals

INTERNET, undated

Regional giants Mexico and the United States qualified for the 2010 World Cup, as Honduras and Costa Rica aim for the third Concacaf qualifying spot in the next and final round. The US beat Honduras 3-2 in San Pedro Sula Saturday, to raise its qualifying total to 19 points.

Earlier, Mexico took the first qualifying spot with a 4-1 victory over El Salvador in Aztec Stadium, its sixth victory taking it to 18 points.

El Salvador and Trinidad y Tobago were eliminated. Costa Rica blanked Trinidad y Tobago 4-0 for its fifth victory, to move into third place with 15 points. Honduras dropped to fourth with 13 points.

In Wednesday's final round, Costa Rica will face the US as Honduras goes up against El Salvador to determine the third direct pass to the World Cup in South Africa.

The fourth-place finisher will face the fifth-place team from the South American elimination, for the final qualifying spot from the Western hemisphere.

Lippi looks for omens

SOCCERNET

Holders Italy needed a little bit of luck to qualify for next year's World Cup finals and coach Marcello Lippi hopes some other omens will point towards a successful campaign in South Africa.

Substitute Alberto Gilardino struck in the last minute to give the Azzurri a 2-2 draw against second-placed Ireland in Dublin on Saturday and seal their passage to the finals as Group Eight winners.

With the final group game against Cyprus in Parma on Wednesday, a normally cautious Lippi allowed himself to dream of a repeat of Italy's 1982 and 2006 World Cup triumphs.

"The only other times Italy have qualified with a game to spare was in 1982 and 2006. We won't talk about it, but we know how we finished up. But I'd say it's a good omen," Lippi told Italian television.

A draw was a fair result after an entertaining game and Italy showed a real desire that has not always been apparent in the qualifying campaign, especially after slipping 2-1 behind following Sean St Ledger's 87th minute header.

Fiorentina forward Gilardino was particularly motivated to grab the leveller having failed to properly mark the Irishman.

"We qualified a bit riskily but it is more fun that way," he said. "In the end we deserved a draw, for 2-1 I lost a bit of concentration. This is my most important goal for the Azzurri."

SOUTH AMERICA ZONE

Chile qualify in style

INTERNET, undated



Chile qualified Saturday for the 2010 World Cup, while Argentina obtained a

dramatic injury-time win to get back on track to South Africa. Chile obtained a solid 4-2 away win in Medellin, Colombia, as Argentina beat Peru 2-1 in Buenos Aires despite another very poor performance.

Uruguay also needed an injury-time goal to defeat Ecuador 2-1 in Quito, while Paraguay beat Venezuela 2-1 in Puerto Ordaz.

The top four teams in South America's qualifiers secure a place in the World Cup, while the fifth-placed team gets to clash in a playoff against a side from North or Central America or the Caribbean.

Chile joined Brazil and Paraguay as qualified sides. With only one round of play pending, Argentina stand fourth with 25 points in 17 matches, Uruguay have 24 points, and Ecuador have 23, while Venezuela are on 21.

In Medellin, host Colombia pulled ahead in the 13th minute with an own goal from Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal. Waldo Ponce equalized in the 35th minute, and striker Humberto Suazo put Chile 2-1 up just one minute later.

Giovanni Moreno made things 2-2 in the 63rd minute, but Colombia's hope of making it to South Africa was short-lived.

Jorge Valdivia again put

Chile ahead in the 71st minute, while Fabian Orellana set the definitive 4-2 in the 78th minute.

In Santiago, thousands of people poured out onto the

streets to celebrate Chile's first qualification for a World Cup since 1998. Chile's Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa praised his men's "rebelliousness" on the pitch.



PHOTO: AFP

Portugal winger Simao Sabrosa (L) celebrates with teammate Raul Meireles after scoring his first goal against Hungary during their World Cup qualifying match at the Luz Stadium in Lisbon on Saturday. Simao's brace propelled Portugal into second spot in the group and in the running for the play-offs.