



French forward Karim Benzema (L) celebrates his opening goal with teammates during their Euro 2012 qualifier against Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

France bounce back

AFP, Paris



England striker Wayne Rooney and the French national side gained much needed boosts on the pitch in Tuesday's latest round of Euro 2012 qualifiers. Rooney, whose private life has been thrown into turmoil over allegations of him sleeping with a prostitute, scored the first goal in England's impressive 3-1 away win over Switzerland to make it two wins from two matches and erase memories of their poor World Cup. France's World Cup was even worse than England's, returning after the first round and best remembered for the farcical goings on off it, but goals by Karim Benzema and Florent Malouda saw them to a fluent 2-0 away win against Bosnia - only their second win in 11 matches. However, it is a win that comes against the team coach Laurent Blanc considered the toughest in their group and with several key players suspended for varying lengths of time over their roles in the players strike in South Africa. There were big wins for both Germany - 6-1 over former national coach Bertie Vogts' Azerbaijan with Miroslav Klose's insatiable appetite for goals seeing him score a brace - and a new look Italy ran out 5-0 winners over the Faroe Islands. World Cup finalists the Netherlands edged to a 2-1 win over Finland with Klaas-Jan Huntelaar scoring a double but Portugal's post World Cup woe continued as they followed a humiliating 4-4 home

draw against Cyprus with a 1-0 defeat away to Norway. The only good thing coach Carlos Queiroz - heavily criticised after their exit to eventual champions Spain at the World Cup - can take from it is that he is not responsible for the results as he is serving a six month suspension for insulting anti-doping officials. A 1-0 defeat by Norway - the Scandinavian side's first over their opponents in nine matches - was just about bearable but Scotland avoided what would have been even by their standards a new low in coming from behind to beat minnows Liechtenstein 2-1. However, their winner came in the seventh minute of time added on at the end of the match through Stephen McManus - sending them top of their group. Rooney will have some explaining to do to his wife Colleen over the stories but at least he will be returning on the flight a happier man having scored his first goal on the international stage in a year. England coach Fabio Capello, who saw Adam Johnson and Darren Bent score the others, paid tribute to Rooney's resilience. "You saw the game, no? I think he played well," said the Italian, whose side suffered a double injury blow during the game as Theo Walcott and Jermain Defoe were stretchered off. "He was at the centre of the play, the centre of the movement. I think the pressure was strong for him but he played well." Both France's goals came midway

through the second-half, Benzema scoring his ninth goal in his 29th appearance with a finely-taken shot and Malouda, one of the few players to play anything like to his level in South Africa, adding a second. It left Blanc a delighted man. "Our use of the ball was very good and, contrary to what happened on Friday (against Belarus), we got forward quickly," said Blanc, who had tasted defeat in his first two matches in charge. "The fact we played deeper allowed us to create space and we have players up front, like Karim, who like space. We produced a marvellous result tonight." Klose may have boosted his international tally to 55 making him joint second all-time scorer for his country alongside Joachim Streich, 12 behind Gerd Mueller, but he gave the team's younger players a warning. "There was room for improvement, our conditioning let us down," he said. "We kept our shape tactically, but we have many young players and they need to make the next step up now and reach the next level." Similarly Italy coach Cesare Prandelli was not going overboard after his side's win over the Faroes as he seeks to restore their battered image after a disastrous defence of their world title under Marcello Lippi which saw them come home after the first round. "We've won two games, that's the most important thing. We're looking to develop our style of play, things are progressing slowly but these games are never easy, you still have to play them," he said.

Six-shooter Germany

AFP, Cologne



Germany striker Miroslav Klose took his tally to 55 international goals with a double in the 6-1 rout of Azerbaijan to fire his side to the top of their Euro 2012 qualification group. Before the game, Klose received a special presentation for winning his 100th cap during the World Cup and he capped his 103rd appearance with two goals to leave him as joint second Germany goal-scorer of all time. His goals in injury time at the end of both halves takes him alongside Joachim Streich, but 12 behind Germany's all-time record scorer Gerd Mueller. Klose urged Germany's young stars like Mesut Ozil and Thomas Mueller to raise their game after low-key performances on the back of their break-through at the World Cup. "There was room for improvement, our conditioning let us down," said perfectionist Klose. "We kept our shape tactically, but we have many young players and they need to make the next step up now and reach the next level." After Germany opened their Euro 2012 qualifying campaign with a 1-0 win over Belgium in Brussels last Friday, the win gives Joachim Loew's side six points from their first two games. Cologne striker Lukas Podolski answered his critics in front of his home crowd as he scored a well-timed goal and then set up Klose at the

end of the first-half. After Heiko Westermann grabbed the first, Podolski and Klose struck before Azerbaijan captain Rashad Sadygov scored an own goal and with time almost up, defender Holger Badstuber scored his first goal, before Klose's late second. Azerbaijan coach Bertie Vogts said the result was acceptable. "The result is ok, but we gave away some stupid late goals," said the former German national coach. "But Germany play at a different level to us." Germany are top of Group A, but Turkey also have a 100 per cent record after two games as they beat Belgium 3-2 earlier in Istanbul with Germany set to face Turkey in Berlin on October 8. The game got off to a bruising

start when Germany centre-back Per Mertesacker took an elbow in the face, leaving him with a bloody face, and he was replaced by Westermann after ten minutes. With Germany attacking in waves it was only a matter of time before the home side got the break through they were pushing for and it came on 28 minutes when Westermann tapped in. Azerbaijan striker Vugar Nadyrov tested Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer on 36 minutes with a long-range shot, but as the visitors started tiring Germany extended their lead with two goals in added time at the end of the first-half. Podolski scored after taking a return pass from Real Madrid's Mesut Ozil and driving his shot past goalkeeper Kamran Agayev on 46 minutes. And Podolski turned goal provider when he took a pass from centre-back Badstuber and squared the ball for Klose to tap the ball home past Nadyrov to make it 3-0 at the break. Things got worse for Azerbaijan when Sadygov turned the ball into his own net on 53 minutes, but the visitors pulled a goal back when Neuer made a rare mistake. Striker Vagif Dzavadov curled in a corner and Neuer allowed the ball to bounce off his chest into the back of the net on 57 minutes. Badstuber took advantage of some sloppy defending to score after 86 minutes before some deft footwork from replacement Cacau allowed Klose a simple tap-in from close range to seal the win.



German striker Miroslav Klose (C) scores his first goal past Azerbaijan goalkeeper Kamran Agayev (2nd from R) during their Euro 2012 qualifier in Cologne on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

A new beginning

AFP, Sarajevo



New coach Laurent Blanc believes France's impressive Euro 2012 qualifier win in Bosnia-Herzegovina could mark the beginning of a new era in French football. France appeared to draw a line under their miserable World Cup experience in Sarajevo on Tuesday, meeting out a comprehensive 2-0 win, the points earned by goals from Karim Benzema and Florent Malouda. The manner of the win was as important as the win itself, with France performing with brio and endeavour, looking fast and dangerous in attack to get their Euro 2012 qualifying campaign back on track after Friday's disappointing home defeat to Belarus. "I feel a lot of joy," said Blanc after his first victory at the third attempt since taking over the helm of Les Bleus from Raymond Domenech. Reflecting on his side's opening qualifier 1-0 loss to Belarus at the Stade de France the former Bordeaux coach added: "There, we didn't manage to translate the good things seen in training, in terms of spirit. "Just as we didn't feel despair (after Friday's reverse) we aren't feeling fantastic now (after this win), but it can be the start." Benzema, who was left out of Domenech's World Cup squad, described his 72nd minute goal as "the most important" he had ever scored for his country. "Everyone played very well but I had the

chance to score the goal which acted as a trigger for the game. We remained solid, this is good for the future." The Real Madrid striker, who was injured and missed the Belarus defeat, added: "It's a pleasure to score in the big games and especially in a match where a lot was expected of us and of me." Benzema said he had felt "annoyed" and "revengeful" at being left out of the World Cup. "But that's life," he shrugged. "I'm 22, I've still got everything to prove and to do to build a great career with the France team. I knew I had to produce a big performance (against Bosnia)." Benzema celebrated his return to the side after his injury by opening the scoring when he controlled Gael Clichy's left-wing cross, span away from a defender and fired left-footed past Kenan Hasagic. The visitors doubled their lead six minutes later with a delightfully executed goal; Malouda tapping into an empty net after a one-touch move involving Benzema, Abou Diaby and Mathieu Valbuena. Bosnia coach Safet Susic said he was not surprised by France's performance. "France are a great team and I can't see them not finishing in the top two (in the group)," said Bosnia coach Safet Susic. "It's a big disappointment. We respected France a bit too much. We were too timid." The trip to Sarajevo was supposed to be France's most taxing Group D assignment but the smiles on the players' faces at the final whistle suggested it could be the game that finally put the World Cup fiasco to bed.

Italy's feet on ground

REUTERS, Milan



New Italy coach Cesare Prandelli is not one for jumping up and down on the touchline like a jack-in-a-box and he is not getting carried away with six points out of six against weak Euro 2012 qualifying opponents. The dismal group stage exit at the World Cup under Marcello Lippi is far from forgotten after a fortunate 2-1 comeback win in Estonia on Friday and a 5-0 victory over the Faroe Islands on Tuesday in Florence. Both goals in Tallinn came from corners, as did the first against the Faroes where frontman Alberto Gilardino broke his 11-month international scoring drought with a header. Daniele De Rossi and Fabio Quagliarella's goals on Tuesday were scruffy and Andrea Pirlo netted a late free kick. The only real piece of top class skill in open play came when Antonio Cassano thumped in a wonderful third goal against the Faroes, whose world ranking of 118 is surprisingly high. "We can still improve a lot," Prandelli,

picked as Lippi's successor largely because of his pragmatic approach during five years at Fiorentina, told reporters. He has made wholesale changes to the squad, most notably bringing the mercurial Cassano in from the international wilderness, but the 4-3-3 he feels he is forced to play by Italian soccer's lack of wingers is not functioning perfectly. Cassano is being dragged to the left wing too easily where he struggles to do damage while the midfield trio of De Rossi, Pirlo and Riccardo Montolivo are not breaking into the box enough. Swathes of empty seats in Florence in what was Prandelli's home debut in his former club stadium shows fans have yet to forgive the huge letdown in South Africa. October's Group C trip to Northern Ireland and home game with Serbia will give a much better impression of where Prandelli's new Italy are at. "In the World Cup Italy had difficulties because they were all organised teams and if we had not managed to break through the Faroes early it too would have become tricky," Gilardino said candidly.



Italy star Antonio Cassano (L) shoots to score the third goal against Faroe Island during their Euro 2012 qualifier in Florence on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Capello praises Rooney

AFP, Basel



Fabio Capello heaped praise on Wayne Rooney after the striker ended a week of speculation about his private life by scoring the opening goal in England's 3-1 victory over Switzerland. There were serious questions being asked in England as to whether Rooney would be in the right frame of mind to play in the Euro 2012 qualifier after revelations he cheated on wife Coleen by sleeping with a prostitute. But manager Capello stuck by his man and was rewarded as Rooney scored for the first time in almost a year for England, guiding them to a crucial victory in Group G. "The pressure was on Rooney, but he played very well. He was always at the centre of our play and movement," Capello said. "He was okay and it helped scoring the goal, too. I told you yesterday that he had been okay in training. I'd seen that. Now he plays an official game really well. The players want to play without other things on their minds. "They can focus on the game alone. He did that today. He was really happy at the end, as were the other players at the end. The result was really important." Substitutes Adam Johnson and Darren Bent also scored and Capello believes he has now found the right position for Rooney following a disappointing World Cup. The Manchester United man took up a deep role behind Jermain Defoe, just as he did last week when he set up all four goals in a 4-0 victory over Bulgaria. "He played in a position that he played against Bulgaria, in the hole, and the other two midfielders helped him a lot when the Swiss

had the goal," said Capello. "This position is good for him. It's easy for him to get into positions to shoot at goal." Capello was also delighted at the performance of the untested centre-back combination which paired Joleon Lescott and Phil Jagielka. "They had played together for many years at Everton and I spoke with them before the game, and the confidence and understanding between them was really high," Capello said. Capello was understandably delighted with a victory that leaves England top of Group G with six points from two games. And although they suffered injury concerns, with Arsenal's Theo Walcott and Tottenham's Jermain Defoe both being carried off on a stretcher, the signs for both players are good. "I just spoke with Theo. He tells me it's not such a big problem. I said: 'Two weeks?' He told me less. Defoe was a little thing," he said. X-Rays have already shown there are no broken bones in Walcott's ankle while Defoe has been allowed to fly home and will have a scan on his ankle tomorrow. Ironically the injuries actually helped England because Walcott's replacement Adam Johnson was hugely impressive and scored his country's second goal - while Defoe was lying injured in the centre circle. Then Darren Bent, who eventually replaced Defoe, came on to score the third. The performance will raise questions as to why England were so poor in South Africa given their impressive record in qualifiers. But Capello was quick to find an explanation. "You know my answer. We are really good in this period because we are fresh. All the players can run, their minds are free. Everything they try to do comes off," he said.

RESULTS	
Germany 6 (Westermann 28, Podolski 45+1, Klose 45+2, 90+2, Sadygov 53-og, Badstuber 86) Azerbaijan 1 (Dzavadov 57)	
Turkey 3 (Hamit Altintop 48, Semih 66, Turan 78) Belgium 2 (Van Buyten 28, 69)	
Austria 2 (Linz 90+1, Hoffer 90+2) Kazakhstan 0	
Ireland 3 (Kilbane 15, K. Doyle 41, Keane 54) Andorra 1 (Martinez 45)	
Russia 0 Slovakia 1 (Stoch 27)	
Macedonia 2 (Gjurovski 42, Naumoski 90+6-pen) Armenia 1 (Movsisyan 41)	
Italy 5 (Gilardino 11, De Rossi 22, Cassano 27, Quagliarella 81, Pirlo 89) Faroes 0	
Serbia 1 (Zigic 86) Slovenia 1 (Novakovic 63)	
Bosnia-Herzegovina 0 France 2 (Benzema 72, Malouda 78)	
Belarus 0 Romania 0	
Albania 1 (Salhi 37) Luxembourg 0	
Sweden 6 (Ibrahimovic 7, 77, Simoncini 12-og, Aldo Junior Simoncini 26-og, Granqvist 51, Berg 90+3) San Marino 0	
Hungary 2 (Rudolf 50, Koman 66) Moldova 1 (Suvorov 79)	
Netherlands 2 (Huntelaar 7, 16-pen) Finland 1 (Forsell 18)	
Georgia 0 Israel 0	
Malta 0 Latvia 2 (Gorkss 42, Verpakovskis 85)	
Croatia 0 Greece 0	
Bulgaria 0 Montenegro 1 (Zverotic 35)	
Switzerland 1 (Shaqiri 71) England 3 (Rooney 10, Johnson 69, Bent 88)	
Denmark 1 (Kahlenberg 90+1) Iceland 0	
Norway 1 (Huseklepp 21) Portugal 0	
Scotland 2 (Miller 63, McManus)	

Liechtenstein anthem jeered

AFP, Glasgow

Jeering by some of Scotland's fans to the Liechtenstein national anthem at Hampden Park on Tuesday was disgraceful, Scottish Football Association acting chief executive George Peat has said. The Liechtenstein anthem, which has the same tune as England's God Save The Queen, was met with audible derision ahead of the Euro 2012 qualifier. Peat said on Wednesday: "I was embarrassed and extremely disappointed by the disgraceful behaviour of some of our supporters during the Liechtenstein national anthem at Hampden Park last night. "The Scotland fans have worked hard to earn their reputation throughout the world as fun-loving and respectful followers of football. "Last night, those who chose to boo our opponents' anthem only served to tarnish that reputation. "I apologise unreservedly to our visitors for the crass reaction to their anthem, just as I did in private last night to the Liechtenstein delegation. "It must not be forgotten that all nations must abide by FIFA's Fair Play policy and last night's behaviour does nothing to help Scotland's image." Scotland won the qualifier 2-1 courtesy of Stephen McManus' header in the seventh minute of stoppage time.