



Spain striker Fernando Llorente is ecstatic after scoring against Lithuania during their Euro 2012 qualifier at the El Helmanico Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

Spain, Germany on top

AFP, Paris

World champions Spain went top of Euro 2012 qualifying Group I with a 3-1 win at home to Lithuania on Friday, while Germany beat Turkey 3-0 but Italy were held to a goalless draw in Northern Ireland.

Athletic Bilbao striker Fernando Llorente was Spain's match-winner, putting them in front early in the second period and then restoring their lead two minutes after Daryvydas Sernas had equalised in the 54th minute.

David Silva made doubly sure an upset was avoided with a header 11 minutes from time in Salamanca, as Vicente del Bosque's defending champions established a two-point lead in their group.

"They were three important points for us," said Spain coach Del Bosque.

"It's what we wanted, six points from two matches. We didn't want any surprises."

Boisterous Turkish fans made up almost half of the 74,244-crowd at Berlin's Olympic Stadium, but were silenced by an influential performance from Germany's Turkish-born midfielder Mesut Ozil.

The 21-year-old Real Madrid playmaker blocked out the jeers to seal his side's victory with a 79th-minute

goal, after Miroslav Klose had broken the deadlock shortly before half-time.

Klose netted his second in the 87th minute to claim his fifth goal in three qualifying games and his 57th overall in Germany's colours -- 11 short of Gerd Mueller's all-time record.

"It is impressive how well the team is playing at the moment," said Germany captain Philipp Lahm.

"Nine points from three games and now we have defeated our strongest opponent in the group."

Germany lead Group A by three points from Turkey and Austria, who won 3-0 at home to Azerbaijan and have a game in hand.

Italy dropped their first points of the qualifying games after a dour Group C battle in Belfast.

The four-time world champions enjoyed the lion's share of possession and by far the better goalscoring opportunities, but ultimately had to settle for only a point in front of a spirited Windsor Park crowd.

David Healy squandered a gilt-edged chance for the hosts on 30 minutes when he headed wide when unmarked, while the visitors' best opportunity saw Giampaolo Pazzini misdirect a header four minutes from time.

"We could have been more accurate in the last few metres, but in general I'm satisfied," said Italy coach Cesare Prandelli.

"We managed to play on a difficult pitch and in a challenging atmosphere, and we competed throughout the 90 minutes."

Italy remain top of their pool by a point from second-placed Estonia, who recorded a superb 3-1 victory over Serbia in Belgrade, but Northern Ireland can go joint top if they beat the Faroe Islands on Tuesday.

Portugal got their campaign back on track with a 3-1 at home to Denmark in new

coach Paulo Bento's first game in charge.

A quick-fire first-half double from winger Nani set the hosts on their way in Porto, with a late Cristiano Ronaldo strike sealing victory after the Danes replied via a Ricardo Carvalho own goal.

Elsewhere, beaten World Cup finalists the Netherlands opened up a three-point lead in Group E after a 37th-minute strike from Schalke frontman Klaas-Jan Huntelaar secured a 1-0 win in Moldova.

Hungary climbed to third in the standings with an 8-0 mauling of perennial whipping boys San Marino.

Bottom seeds Montenegro extended their 100 per cent start in Group G with a 1-0 victory at home to Switzerland that sent them three points clear of England, who welcome the Montenegrins to Wembley on Tuesday.

Armenia produced one of the performances of the night to secure a shock 3-1 win over Slovakia in Group B.

Vladimir Weiss's Slovaks, who reached the last 16 at the World Cup, remain level on points at the top of the pool with Russia and the Republic of Ireland, who played out an entertaining game in Dublin that finished with a 3-2 win for the visitors.

France do not play Romania until Saturday, but they had a positive evening as they saw Group D co-leaders Albania and Belarus held to draws by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Luxembourg respectively.

RESULTS

Austria 3 (Proedl 3, Arnautovic 53, 90+2) Azerbaijan 0

Germany 3 (Klose 42, 87, Ozil 79) Turkey 0

Kazakhstan 0 Belgium 2 (Ogunjimi 52, 70)

Republic of Ireland 2 (Keane 72-pen, Long 78) **Russia 3** (Kerzhakov 11, Dzagoev 29, Shirokov 50)

Northern Ireland 0 Italy 0

Serbia 1 (Kuzmanovic 60) **Estonia 3** (Kink 63, Vassiljev 73, Lukovic 90+1-og)

Moldova 0 **Netherlands 1** (Huntelaar 37)

Greece 1 (Torosidis 58) Latvia 0

Montenegro 1 (Vucinic 67) Switzerland 0

Portugal 3 (Nani 29, 31, Cristiano Ronaldo 85) Denmark 1 (Carvalho 79-og)

Czech Republic 1 (Hubnik 70) Scotland 0

Oezil's ankle a worry

AFP, Berlin

German midfielder Mesut Ozil will undergo a last minute test on an ankle injury before the World Cup semi-finalists fly to Kazakhstan on Monday for their Euro 2012 qualifier the national federation announced.

The 21-year-old Real Madrid star scored in the 3-0 defeat of Turkey in their Group A qualifier on Friday but was replaced in the 90th minute as he struggled with his ankle problem.

"National coach Joachim Loew has set up with the doctors and physical trainers to give him (Ozil) a fitness test in the final training session on Monday," a statement from the federation announced.

Germany, whose largely youthful side's vibrant play was one of the highlights of the World Cup finals, head the group with nine points from three matches.

Okazaki to miss Korea friendly

AFP, Tokyo

Japan striker Shinji Okazaki, who scored the winner in Friday's shock 1-0 win over Argentina at home, will miss a friendly against South Korea away next week due to injury.

The 24-year-old Shimizu S-Pulse player has injured his right hamstring and will not be in the national squad that travels to Seoul for Tuesday's match, the Japan Football Association said Saturday.

Okazaki volleyed home a rebound off a long shot by Japan captain and Wolfsburg midfielder Makoto Hasebe in the 19th minute against Argentina, as former AC Milan boss Alberto Zaccheroni made his coaching debut with the side.

"I really regret it. I wanted to stay with this team a little longer and try to understand manager Zaccheroni's plans," Okazaki said, adding he wanted to revenge Japan's two defeats to South Korea this year.

Shimizu teammate midfielder Takuya Honda and Brazilian-born Nagoya Grampus centre back Marcus Tullio Tanaka have also pulled out of the South Korea match due to injuries, the association said.

Honda did not play on Friday due to a strained right thigh muscle after he was called up to the national team for the first time.

Tullio is suffering a right knee injury that forced him out of the Argentina game, while fellow Japan centre back Yuji Nakazawa is being idled due to a leg injury.

Italy frustrated

AFP, Belfast



Northern Ireland manager Nigel Worthington insisted his side should have claimed a famous scalp after they held four-time world champions Italy to a 0-0 draw in a Euro 2012 qualifier in Belfast.

Nigel Worthington's side were able to subdue the Italians thanks to a fiercely competitive performance, but they could have clinched a shock win if David Healy had converted a golden opportunity in the first half on Friday.

It is 24 years since Northern Ireland last made a major finals, yet they have secured some memorable victories in recent years, with England and Spain both leaving Belfast empty-handed, and this will go down as another heroic home display.

Northern Ireland have now taken four points from their first two Group C matches, but Worthington felt the hosts could have played even better.

"It was a very hard game. We knew Italy would have their share of possession, but we have got a terrific point out of the game without playing as well as we can," Worthington said.

"The players are all disappointed in the dressing room and that is good to see.

"I must say the shape of the team on the night, and their courage, was absolutely fantastic. They stuck to their task and were solid and resilient."

Italy coach Cesare Prandelli admitted his side could have few complaints about the result because their finishing had let them down: "Northern Ireland are always difficult opponents at home," he said.

"We had a lot of chances but suffered a lot of bad luck with our finishing. But I am pleased with the work the team put in.

"Our mental approach was strong and Northern Ireland got a big advantage from the crowd. It was a fair result, I feel."

After a disastrous World Cup campaign

ended with a first round exit in South Africa, Prandelli has been overhauling an aging squad and his young side arrived in Belfast on top of the group after two successive victories.

They controlled the tempo in the early stages of the first half and threatened twice as Domenico Criscito broke clear only to drag his shot wide of the far post before Simone Pepe got into a good position but failed to test Northern Ireland goalkeeper Maik Taylor.

Fired up by a passionate capacity crowd, Northern Ireland gradually began to rattle Italy with their constant pressing and the hosts should have taken the lead in the 31st minute.

When Chris Brunt curled a perfect cross towards Healy at the far post, Northern Ireland's record scorer looked certain to end his run of two years without a goal, but he could only direct his header tamely wide from close-range.

Italy responded to that narrow escape by launching an incisive counter-attack which left Marco Borriello one on one with Taylor, but the striker's effort was too close to the keeper and Antonio Cassano curled the rebound wide of a post.

Worthington's side felt aggrieved just before half-time when French referee Tony Chapron refused to award a penalty after Daniele De Rossi appeared to handle the ball in the area.

Borriello found himself in space in the 62nd minute but failed to trouble Taylor with a weak finish.

Antonio Cassano went close with a curling effort that was superbly tipped over by Taylor.

Substitute Giampaolo Pazzini could have sealed it for Italy in the 86th minute but headed wide of the post with a glancing effort.

Northern Ireland wasted a chance to put pressure on Prandelli's men when Steven Davis somehow managed to kick the flag instead of the ball when taking a corner.

Davis nearly went from zero to hero in the final moments but his shot was parried to safety after a neat exchange of passes with Niall McGinn.

Loew delighted

AFP, Berlin



Germany coach Joachim Loew admitted he was delighted with his side's impressive 3-0 Euro 2012 qualifier win over Turkey to take control of Group A as his side picked up their third straight win.

Veteran striker Miroslav Klose netted either side of half-time on Friday and young Turk Mesut Ozil scored the second to give Loew's side the maximum nine points after three games.

Ozil is an injury doubt ahead of Tuesday's qualifier against Kazakhstan in Astana after limping off at the end of the match with an ankle injury, but Loew was delighted as his side ran Turkey ragged.

"The team showed they really wanted this and we have earned a deserved victory," said a delighted Loew.

"I hadn't expected to win by such a big amount, because it was always going to be a difficult game. For the Turks, the game was always going to be a matter of honour."

Germany are now in firm control while Guus Hiddink-coached Turkey are third on six and suffered their first defeat of the qualifying campaign.

"I think we did our best to hold the Germans, but we had our problems. We made a few mistakes, especially for the third goal," admitted Hiddink.

"But the Germans played very well, we missed a good chance through Halil and you need to convert those against a team like Germany.

"My team is still young and have much to learn."



Germany striker Miroslav Klose (L) heads past Turkey goalkeeper Volkan Demirel during their Euro 2012 qualifier at the Olympia Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

England lose Jagielka

AFP, London

England defender Phil Jagielka has been ruled out of Tuesday's Euro 2012 qualifier against Montenegro after suffering a hamstring injury in training on Friday.

Jagielka, who has been replaced by Bolton centre-back Gary Cahill, had been in contention to start the match at Wembley after impressive displays in England's last two matches against Bulgaria and Switzerland.

But the Everton star missed a training game at Arsenal's London Colney complex on Friday after experiencing tightness in his hamstring during the previous session.

A scan confirmed Jagielka would not be fit to face Montenegro, with England coach Fabio Capello now likely to restore Rio Ferdinand and John Terry to the centre of his defence after the pair missed the team's last two qualifiers.

Meanwhile, Manchester City midfielder Gareth Barry joined up with the England squad on Friday after being given additional time at home due to personal reasons.

Aussies edge Paraguay

Football

AFP, Sydney

A cracking volley from defender David Carney gave Australia a 1-0 win over World Cup quarter-finalists Paraguay in a tune-up for January's Asian Cup in Qatar.

The Blackpool left-back's well struck goal in the 53rd minute proved the difference as the Socceroos remained unbeaten in five encounters with the higher-ranked South Americans.

It was Australia's final home international ahead of the Asian Cup with a match against Egypt likely in Cairo next month.

Australia also remained unbeaten in three games under their new German head coach Holger Osieck, who took over from Dutchman Pim Verbeek after this year's World Cup in South Africa.

"When we get our stuff together we are defensively well organised and set up and if we play very courageously like we did today then I am confident that the Asian Cup will be a very good tournament for us," Osieck said.

Osieck played star Everton midfielder Tim Cahill for 76 minutes and brought off Galatasaray's Harry Kewell with a few minutes left.

Goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer, who deputised for injured skipper Lucas Neill, kept a clean sheet and was only called on to make four saves during the match.

The match got a bit messy in the second half and twice Japanese referee Yuichi Nishimura

pulled out the yellow card for Paraguayans Dario Veron and Claudio Rodriguez.

Spanish-based striker Nelson Valdez had Paraguay's best and only chance of the opening half when his shot on the turn was well taken by Schwarzer after 13 minutes.

Australia took time to find their rhythm but forced Paraguay goalkeeper Diego Barreto to make two saves in as many minutes midway through the opening half.

Unmarked Cahill launched a free header off a Luke Wilkshire free kick which Barreto saved and the Paraguayan keeper was again at full stretch to block a fierce long-range volley from midfielder Jason Culina moments later.

Australia appealed for a penalty in stoppage time when Victor Caceres appeared to bring down Mile Jedinak while jostling for a Wilkshire free kick.

Barreto made another diving save to deny Richard Garcia just minutes after the interval.

Carney put the Australians a goal up eight minutes after the break with a stinging volley which beat Barreto at the near post.

The Australians had more of the play and it was only in the final 15 minutes that Paraguay came more into it with Carlos Bonet and substitute Federico Santander looking dangerous.

The loss continued Paraguay's mixed results on their Asian tour, after they lost 1-0 to Japan in Yokohama and drew 1-1 with China in Beijing. Australia have yet to lose in their five encounters with Paraguay, all of them in Australia.

Paraguay have a match against fellow World Cup team New Zealand in Wellington on October 12.

Uruguay destroy Indonesia

Football

AFP, Jakarta

World Cup semifinalists Uruguay cruised to a 7-1 victory against Indonesia in a friendly match Friday at Jakarta's national stadium.

Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono witnessed the match in which Indonesia held up well until near the end of the first half, when many players seemed to tire.

Indonesia, ranked a lowly 131 in the FIFA world rankings, took a shock lead in the 16th minute with a shot from striker Boaz Solossa after a pass from captain Bambang Pamungkas.

But Uruguay levelled the score in the 34th minute when Edinson Cavani headed in from a pass.

Star striker Luis Suarez put the South Americans ahead nine minutes later, firing in a hard shot after overcoming two Indonesian defenders near the centre of the penalty box.

Suarez scored another goal in the 54th minute in a one-on-one situation with Indonesia goalkeeper Markus Horison.

Sebastian Eguren scored Uruguay's fourth in the 56th minute after taking a pass from Suarez on the right field.

Suarez slotted in from the penalty spot in the 68th minute to complete his hat-trick after a foul by goalkeeper Horison, and Cavani added another two goals in the 80th and 83th minutes for a hat-trick of his own.

After the match Suarez said: "Indonesia played swiftly and good. But unfortunately, they could not maintain their game because they could not concentrate well."

His captain Diego Lugano added: "Indonesia was able to make us lose our concentration in the early minutes. So it was not surprising that Indonesia could score a beautiful goal."

Uruguay's star striker Diego Forlan, who was voted 2010 World Cup's best player, did not make it to Indonesia for the match.