



Germany's midfielder Andre Schuerrle (L) celebrates with striker Mario Gomez after scoring during their Euro 2012 qualifier against Azerbaijan in Baku on Tuesday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Germany go 10 clear

AFP, Baku



Germany went ten-points clear at the top of their Euro 2012 qualifying group on Tuesday as stars Mario Gomez and Mesut Ozil netted in a 3-1 win over minnows Azerbaijan.

Now only a mathematical chance remains of Joachim Loew's side failing to qualify for next year's finals, to be hosted by the Ukraine and Poland, as they picked up their seventh straight win in Group A.

"I must pay the team a big compliment, I think we have put in a great season," said Loew, who enjoyed his 47th win from 68 international as coach.

"After all, it is 24 days since the end of the German league season and the players are at their limits.

"Azerbaijan defended well, so ultimately, I'm very satisfied."

Despite coming to Baku, near the Caspian Sea, with a depleted squad, the Germans still had enough young talent to comfortably see off Azerbaijan and at 27-years-old, captain Philipp Lahm was the oldest German on the pitch.

"Hard to believe that at 27, I was the oldest out there, but it shows the depth of young talent we have in the squad," said Lahm, who was winning his 80th cap.

Real Madrid star Ozil opened the scoring with half an hour gone at the Tofik Bakhranov Stadium when he latched onto a loose ball in the penalty area and curled his shot around diving goalkeeper Kamran Agayev.

The winger then turned provider for the second goal when he found plenty of space down the left flank and crossed the ball in for Gomez to drill his shot into the back of the net on 41 minutes.

It was Gomez's fourth goal in his last three games for Germany as the Bayern Munich star's purple patch continues having netted 28 goals last season in the Bundesliga.

The hosts scored a consolation goal with time almost up when striker Murad Huseynov stabbed home his shot in the 89th minute after capitalising on a mistake by Germany defender Mats Hummels, who failed to get his header away.

But replacement Andre Schuerrle netted Germany's third deep in added time after fellow sub Mario Goetze split the defence and after Gomez's shot was saved, Schuerrle followed up.

The Germans can wrap up qualification if they beat Austria in Gelsenkirchen on September 2.

The defeat leaves Azerbaijan's German coach Berti Vogts in a precarious position as his side are joint bottom of the table and he was pelted with loo paper at a news conference in Baku on Sunday by angry journalists.

Brazil pick injured duo

Football

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Brazil coach Mano Menezes has named injured pair Paulo Henrique Ganso and Alexandre Pato in his 22-man squad for the Copa America.

"We checked (with the doctors) and we're absolutely certain they will be at the Copa America," Menezes told a news conference after Brazil's 1-0 win over Romania in their final warm-up friendly.

The tournament starts on July 1 in Argentina, with Brazil looking to defend the title they won in 2007.

Pato (shoulder) and Ganso (thigh) also missed Saturday's 0-0 draw with Nether-

SQUAD

Goalkeepers:

Victor (Gremio), Julio Cesar (Inter Milan)

Defenders:

Lucio, Maicon (both Inter Milan), Thiago Silva (AC Milan), David Luiz (Chelsea), Luisao (Benfica), Andre Santos (Fenerbahce), Daniel Alves, Adriano (both Barcelona)

Midfielders:

Lucas (Sao Paulo), Lucas Leiva (Liverpool), Elano (Santos), Elias (Atletico Madrid), Jadson (Shakhtar Donetsk), Ramires (Chelsea), Sandro (Tottenham Hotspur), Paulo Henrique Ganso (Santos)

Forwards:

Alexandre Pato, Robinho (both AC Milan), Neymar (Santos), Fred (Fluminense)

lands in Goiania.

Fans booed the team after both friendlies but Menezes said he saw some good build-up play and was confident the finishing would come.

"I always made it clear (Ganso) is the player with the most qualities in his favour (to be the playmaker)," Menezes said of the talented Santos midfielder.

Santos were planning to bring Ganso back from his injury layoff in the second leg of the Libertadores Cup final against Penarol of Uruguay in Sao Paulo on June 22, he added. The first leg is in Montevideo next week.

"For him to play that match he will have had 10 days of hard work," Menezes said.

Japan need to raise their game

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Keisuke Honda says Japan need to raise their game ahead of World Cup qualifiers, contradicting coach Alberto Zaccheroni who said he was pleased with the scoreless friendly draw with the Czech Republic.

The Asian champions attempted 11 shots, including four Honda free-kicks, against an under-strength Czech side, but towering Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech stood in their way at Yokohama's Nissan Stadium on Tuesday.

Zaccheroni praised his men for their efforts to adjust to a new 3-4-3 formation which they had already tested in

another 0-0 draw with Peru in a friendly in Niigata last week.

But CSKA Moscow and Blue Samurai star Honda wasn't convinced.

"We aren't there yet on the whole. I can imagine the coach saying something positive by taking various factors into consideration. But we should not talk at such a level," the outspoken 24-year-old told Japanese media.

"We must play a kind of football that is more awe-inspiring," said Honda, a talented attacking midfielder who has openly declared Japan should aim for the title at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

"Are we getting the sense of direction? I don't think it is that easy," added Honda, who powered Japan to the last 16 in South Africa last year for their

best-ever World Cup on foreign soil.

The new system, which is supposed to make more attacking use of the flanks and saw Honda pushed further forward, failed to produce a goal in either game despite Japan starting with seven Europe-based players on Tuesday.

"We played well even though we adopted an unfamiliar system," insisted former AC Milan boss Zaccheroni. "We lacked many elements including speed. But overall I'm satisfied."

"We are moving in the right direction."

In a dull first period, Cech punched away Gamba Osaka midfielder Yasuhito Endo's 37th-minute free-kick, the only shot on target from either side in the first 45 minutes.

Schalke chase Lehmann

AFP, Berlin

Champions League semi-finalists Schalke 04 have confirmed their interest in former Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann following his brief comeback last season with Premier League giants Arsenal.

With Germany's first choice shot-stopper Manuel Neuer set to quit the Royal Blues for Bayern Munich on July 1, Lehmann's name has featured in Schalke's planning.

Schalke signed goalkeeper Ralf Faehrmann from relegated German league side Eintracht Frankfurt at the end of the season, but Heldt insists the new shot-stopper is not guaranteed to be first-choice next season.

Kawaga not for sale

AFP, Berlin

German champions Borussia Dortmund have insisted Japan star Shinji Kagawa is not for sale, despite reports he is on the radar of Premier League giants Manchester United.

According to reports in the Japanese media on Monday, Sir Alex Ferguson's United are planning to send scouts to follow the 22-year-old attacking midfielder at Dortmund games next season.

But Borussia insist Kagawa will be back in the Bundesliga next season.

Irish slay Italy

Football

AFP, Liege

Republic of Ireland manager Giovanni Trapattoni put one over his compatriots on Tuesday as his side beat a largely dominant Italy 2-0 in a friendly here.

However, while the Italians wasted what few chances came their way the Irish scored with both theirs through Keith Andrews in the 35th minute and then Simon Cox added a second on the stroke of full-time.

Both Trapattoni and his Italian counterpart Cesare Prandelli opted to rest several of their first choice players after they won their respective Euro 2012 qualifiers at the weekend. Trapattoni, one of the most successful club coaches of all time but who failed to reproduce that in a four year spell as Italy coach, was delighted with his side's display.

"We showed a really good mental attitude," said the 72-year-old.

"We really wanted this win. It is just how I like to see my players perform."

"Italy had the majority of the possession, combined well but my players showed the necessary discipline."

"Football is not just about the 'show', it is also and maybe even more so the achievement of ones goals," added Trapattoni, who is one of only two coaches to win league titles in four different countries.

Prandelli for his part was disappointed by his side's performance.

"My team took a step backwards this evening," said Prandelli, who replaced Marcello Lippi after the 'azzurri' woeful defence of their world title last year when they went out in the group stage.

"The players forgot one essential thing: in order for one's individuality to shine you have to play as a team."

"Today, my boys did quite the opposite. Each one of them tried to find the answer on his own. And we saw what the result of that was," added the 53-year-old.



Italy midfielder Riccardo Montolivo (C) tries to find his way between a host of Irish players during their friendly in Liege on Tuesday.

PHOTO:
AFP

SPORTS POLL

Do you think Barcelona are the greatest club side ever?

Yes 80.2%

No 19.8%

TOTAL VOTES: 298

WEEKLY QUESTION

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