



Germany midfielder Mesut Ozil (R) celebrates his second goal with teammate Miroslav Klose during their Euro 2012 qualifier in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

PHOTO:
AFP

Win delights Sabella

Football

AFP, Kolkata

New Argentina coach Alejandro Sabella was counting the positives after his team pulled off a 1-0 friendly victory over an improving Venezuela in his debut match on Friday.

Sabella, 56, replaced the under-fire Sergio Batista after Argentina's quarterfinal exit to Uruguay in the Copa America in July.

Immediately afterwards, Sabella declared his main task would be to restore pride in the South American giants as they prepare to open their 2014 World Cup campaign in October.

Argentina, two-time World Cup winners, have not won any trophy at the senior level since their Copa America victory way back in 1993.

Sabella has not had much time with his team as most of the players have been away playing in foreign leagues, but that did not come in the way of his side securing a winning start for their coach.

"I am really happy to start out with a win," Sabella said at the post-match news conference in Kolkata late Friday.

"We have been together only for three days. We will need a lot of time on the training field for better understanding.

"There were a lot of positives to be taken from our performance although we were a little slow in counter-attacks. We need to think out ways to improve on that too."

"I like to play with a lot of midfielders and keep possession, play a lot of passes amongst ourselves and in that regard I think we did well. I will give my team six out of 10," Sabella said.

The coach was full of praise for star striker Lionel Messi, who created many chances and set up the late winner after a goal-less first half, in what was his first game as captain of the national side.

"Messi is the best player not just for me, the team but the entire world. And I think he showed that again today," the coach said.

"In our history in every generation we get a great player in Argentina, now Leo is that exceptional player. Everywhere he goes there is a crowd to see him because it can be a life-changing experience."

VDV out for 6 weeks

AFP, London

Tottenham midfielder Rafael van der Vaart will be sidelined for six weeks after suffering a torn hamstring.

Van der Vaart sustained the injury in his left leg in the closing stages of last Sunday's 5-1 home defeat against Manchester City.

The Dutch international has since been diagnosed with a hamstring tear after a scan and is not expected to return until the middle of October.

That means Van der Vaart will miss Premier League games against Wolves, Liverpool, Wigan and the north London derby against Arsenal at White Hart Lane.

He will also be unavailable for the start of Spurs' Europa League campaign, including games against PAOK Salonika and Shamrock Rovers.

"An MRI scan has confirmed that Rafael van der Vaart has suffered a hamstring tear," a statement on Tottenham's website confirmed.

Germany lead charge

AFP, Paris



Former champions Germany were given an early chance for celebration on Friday after becoming the first team to qualify for the 2012 European Championship finals.

A 6-2 hammering of neighbours Austria means Joachim Loew's Germany side have now taken their tally in Group A to an unassailable 24 points after winning all of their eight games to date.

France edged closer to qualification but had to survive a scare in Tirana before running out 2-1 winners against Albania, a result that allowed Laurent Blanc's side to move three points clear at the top of Group D.

A resurgent Wayne Rooney meanwhile played a starring role as England romped to a 3-0 victory over hapless Bulgaria which leaves Fabio Capello's men firmly in control at the top of Group G with only two games remaining.

Italy also edged closer to securing automatic qualification but, like France, had to survive an edgy away encounter, away to the Faroe Islands, before running out 1-0 winners.

Elsewhere, Ireland's qualifying hopes suffered a blow when they were held to a scoreless draw in Dublin by Slovakia. Following Russia's victory over Macedonia earlier, Dick Advocaat's men top Group B and welcome Ireland to Moscow on Tuesday in what may be the defining clash of the campaign.

The Netherlands, ranked the world's number one team, claimed a record 11-0 win against minnows San Marino to claim their seventh qualifying win on the trot as they inch closer to qualifying from Group E with three

games remaining.

Germany have been one of the form teams in Europe going into and since the 2010 World Cup, where they finished third behind Spain and the Netherlands.

And despite showing some chinks in defence Loew's men maintained their discipline and poise against a plucky Austrian side to show they will be one of the teams to beat in Poland and Ukraine next year.

Former world champions France led 2-0 at half-time through goals from Karim Benzema and Yann M'Vila.

However Les Bleus conceded the initiative to their hosts after the restart when a defensive mix-up enabled Erjon Bogdani to pull a goal back, and they were made to sweat during an uncomfortable second half.

Victory puts Blanc's side in a strong position with three games to play, although Bosnia-Herzegovina remain on their tails after winning 2-0 in Belarus.

Rooney scored twice as new-look England edged closer to qualification with a comprehensive 3-0 win in Sofia which left Capello's men three points clear at the top of Group G after Wales defeated second-placed Montenegro 2-1 in the pool's other game.

If England pick up a further three points against Wales at Wembley next week, they will need only a point from their final game in Montenegro on October 7 to guarantee qualification.

Italy, who have three games remaining, will secure their Euro 2012 ticket if they beat Slovenia in Florence on Tuesday.

But after Antonio Cassano's strike secured the points in the Faroe Islands, 'keeper Gianluigi Buffon -- who saw the hosts hit the woodwork twice -- was less than impressed.

RESULTS

Germany 6 (Klose 8, Ozil 23, 47, Podolski 28, Schurrle 84, Gotze 88)
Austria 2 (Arnautovic 42, Harnik 51)
Republic of Ireland 0 Slovakia 0
Russia 1 (Semshov 41) Macedonia 0
Faroe Islands 0 **Italy 1** (Cassano 11)
Albania 1 (Bogdani 46) **France 2** (Benzema 11, M'Vila 18)
Netherlands 11 (van Persie 7, 65, 67, 79, Sneijder 12, 87, Heitinga 17, Kuyt 49, Huntelaar 56, 77, Wijnaldum 89) San Marino 0
Bulgaria 0 **England 3** (Cahill 13, Rooney 21, 45)
Cyprus 0 **Portugal 4** (Ronaldo 35-pen,

Matthaus apologises

AFP, Sofia



Bulgaria coach Lothar Matthaus apologised after England players were racially abused during their Euro 2012 qualifying match here Friday, branding the chants "pitiful."

Several of England's black players were subjected to monkey noises throughout their team's 3-0 win at the Vasil Levski Stadium, prompting English officials to complain to their Bulgarian counterparts after the match.

World Cup-winner Matthaus was dismayed by the abuse suffered by Chris Smalling, Ashley Cole, Theo Walcott and Ashley Young.

"... I can say it's pitiful when such things happen," the legendary former Germany captain said.

"Because of that I would like to apologise on behalf of the Bulgarian Football Union."

England striker Wayne Rooney said his teammates had been aware of the abuse during the match.

"As players we could hear it on the pitch. It has been going on for years and it is not right," he said.

"It needs to stop and hopefully something will be done about it."

Matthaus meanwhile said his side were outclassed by England, who were 3-0 up by half-time after two goals from Wayne Rooney following an opening strike by Bolton defender Gary Cahill.

The defeat ended Bulgaria's faint hopes of qualifying for next year's finals in Poland and the Ukraine.

"The difference between the English players and the Bulgarian players was clearly vivid. In all areas of the game the England team was a class above," Matthaus said.

MU's No 2 writes off Chelsea

AFP, London

Manchester United first-team coach Rene Meulensteen has written off title rivals Chelsea as too old to provide a sustained challenge for the Premier League this season.

The Blues have nine players aged over 30 and Sir Alex Ferguson's assistant is convinced that will count against them as they try to keep pace with a United squad infused with young blood this season.

While Chelsea boss Andre Villas-Boas has to rely on ageing stars like Frank Lampard, Didier Drogba and John Terry, Meulensteen expects United starlets Danny Welbeck, Phil Jones, Tom Cleverley and Chris Smalling to sweep their rivals aside on a wave of enthusiasm.

He also believes Manchester City, tipped as serious contenders for the title, will not be able to compete with United's experience in winning silverware.

United are currently top of the table after winning their first three matches, including their emphatic 8-2 rout of Arsenal last weekend.

Meulensteen claims United have nothing to fear from any of their top-four competition, insisting the Gunners have regressed and Liverpool are still rebuilding.

Fabregas leads fightback

Football

AFP, St Gallen

Second-half substitute Cesc Fabregas scored twice as reigning European and world champions Spain fought back from two goals down to beat Chile 3-2 in a friendly here on Friday.

Vicente Del Bosque's side were punished for a slow start as Chile raced into a 2-0 lead thanks to goals from Mauricio Isla and Eduardo Vargas, but the introduction of Andres Iniesta at half-time reinvigorated the Spain midfield.

Within nine minutes the Barcelona man had pulled a goal back and it was his pass that allowed fellow substitute Fabregas to level the scores with 20 minutes remaining.

Fabregas then scored the winner in stoppage time, converting the rebound after his penalty had been saved by Claudio Bravo.

The win comes as the perfect boost to a Spain squad deprived of several key players as they prepare to host Liechtenstein in a Euro 2012 qualifier on Tuesday.

Raul Albiol and Athletic Bilbao midfielder Javi Martinez started in the heart of the defence, and the makeshift duo were given a hard time as Chile came racing out of the blocks.

Isla beat Iker Casillas with a well-hit crossed-shot and, after David Villa and David Silva had both had chances for Spain, Chile doubled their lead on 20 minutes when Alexis Sanchez supplied Vargas, who finished coolly past Casillas.

Only a fine Casillas save prevented Jean Beausejour from adding another, and Spain were lucky to be just two behind at the break.



Spain midfielder Cesc Fabregas (C) runs to take a penalty during their international friendly against Chile in St. Gallen on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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