

Spain, Italy thru'

AFP, Paris

Defending champions Spain and fellow European giants Italy secured their places at Euro 2012 on Tuesday.

Spain eased to a 6-0 win at home to minnows Liechtenstein to make it six wins out of six while Italy left it late to gain a 1-0 home win over an unimpressive Slovenia, Giampaolo Pazzini coming on as a substitute to score with five minutes remaining in front of a pitiful crowd of just 18,000.

The somewhat controversially world number one ranked team Holland, beaten by Spain in last year's World Cup final, are all but certain to join them as they beat Finland 2-0 away to make it eight wins from eight qualifiers and need a point from their two remaining matches.

One of those is against the only team that can catch them Sweden, who beat woeful San Marino 5-0 leaving the losers pointless and having conceded 46 goals in their nine matches.

England too took a giant step towards the finals with a somewhat fortuitous 1-0 win over Wales at Wembley, Ashley Young's early goal proving just enough, though, veteran Welsh striker Robert Earnshaw will have nightmares for a long time to come at how he came to miss an open goal.

Fabio Capello's side lead Montenegro by six points - the Balkan side have a game in hand - with the two teams due to meet in their next match on October 7.

The Euro 2000 champions France, though, still have it all to do as they stumbled to a 0-0 draw away against Romania on a terrible pitch, but with Bosnia beating Belarus 1-0 the French have just a point advantage over them.

All should be decided when they clash on October 11, though, the Romanians still entertain outside chances of topping the table themselves.

Two groups remain real nailbiters with Group F seeing Croatia leapfrog Euro 2004 champions Greece in the standings after the former trounced Israel 3-1 - which will probably see the losing coach Luis Fernandez's turbulent reign come to an end - while the Greeks faltered with a 1-1 draw away in Latvia.

All should be clearer when Greece entertain Croatia in Athens next month, a match that will not be for the faint hearted given Greek fans propensity for hooliganism.

Group B too is simmering nicely for a fight to the death as Russia somehow were held 0-0 in Moscow by a Republic of Ireland side that kept a ceaseless wave of Russian attacks at bay - veteran goalkeeper Shay Given and Aston Villa team-mate Richard Dunne the outstanding performers.

RESULTS

Russia 0 Ireland 0
Slovakia 0 Armenia 4 (Movsisyan 57, Mkhitarjan 70, Ghazaryan 80, Sarkisov 90+1)
Italy 1 (Pazzini 85) Slovenia 0
Bosnia-Herzegovina 1 (Misimovic 87) Belarus 0
Romania 0 France 0
Finland 0 Netherlands 2 (Strootman 29, De Jong 90+3)
San Marino 0 Sweden 5 (Kallstrom 64, Wilhelmsson 70, 90+3, Olsson 81, Hysen 88)
Croatia 3 (Modric 47, Da Silva 55, 57) Israel 1 (Hemed 44)
Latvia 1 (Cauna 19) Greece 1 (Papadopoulos 84)
England 1 (Young 35) Wales 0
Spain 6 (Negredo 34, 37, Xavi 44,



Italy striker Giampaolo Pazzini celebrates his all-important goal against Slovenia during their Euro 2012 qualifier at the Artemio Franchi Stadium in Florence on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sokratis keeps it short

AFP, Berlin

Stadium announcers in the German league can breathe a sigh of relief as it was announced Tuesday Werder Bremen's Greek defender Sokratis Papastathopoulos will now simply be known by his first name.

The 23-year-old has played all four of Bremen's German league games this season, giving Bundesliga announcers and broadcasters alike nightmares trying to get their tongues around his unusual name.

But the German Football League (DFL) have now listed the 23-year-old, who has won 19 caps for Greece, as simply Sokratis.

He is on loan from Italian side Genoa and Bremen's opponents can expect to see more of him this season.

"He does not shy away from tackles and is very intense when he goes in for them," said Werder coach Thomas Schaaf.

On Tuesday, Sokratis was in the Greece squad for the Euro 2012 qualifier against Latvia in Riga.

Ignorant Forlan

AFP, Rome



New Inter Milan striker Diego Forlan claims he didn't know the UEFA regulation that has ruled him out of his team's Champions League group stages.

Forlan played for his previous club Atletico Madrid in the Europa League third qualifying round against Norwegians Stromsgodset earlier this season.

UEFA rules state that he cannot represent another club in Europe until the New Year at least.

He was left out of Atletico's play-off tie with Portugal's Viktoria Guimaraes as he was in discussions with Inter but by then it was too late.

And Forlan told Spanish radio station Onda Cera that he simply didn't know the rules.

"The truth is I didn't know UEFA's rules and so I was going on what I'd been told, which was that it was enough to not play against Viktoria Guimaraes," Forlan said, according to Italian press.

"That was while knowing that Atletico Madrid wanted to sell me.

"I was told about the possibility of going to Inter Milan during the days while we were preparing to face Viktoria Guimaraes and with the coach we discussed the possibility of not playing so that I'd be available for the Champions League.

"If everyone was saying that I was going to leave Atletico, it was better for me to be available to play in the Champions League without complicating things.

"I didn't know until Friday night that it wasn't possible to put me on the list."

Inter signed Forlan as a replacement for Samuel Eto'o, whom they allowed to join Russians Anzhi Makhachkala.

Having included Forlan in the list they submitted to UEFA, they left off 18-year-old Dutchman Luc Castaignos, who is still ineligible as he was left off the original list.

QPR after Beckham

AFP, Undated

Queens Park Rangers manager Neil Warnock on Wednesday dropped the biggest hint yet that the Premier League side are chasing David Beckham.

Newly promoted Rangers, who last month saw ambitious Malaysian businessman Tony Fernandes become the majority shareholder, have since consistently been linked with Beckham, who plays for LA Galaxy.

"About three weeks ago I would not have dreamed to sign Joey Barton so I will never write anything off," said Warnock, who has embellished his squad with several new players since Fernandes arrived at the London club.

"The chairman Tony Fernandes has got such (an opinion)... why accept the average when you can reach for the top?"

"That is how he is. It came out of the blue. I think anything is possible. He is a very astute businessman," Warnock said in a conference call with Malaysian media.

Cacauspares blushes

AFP, Gdansk

Football

An equaliser from Germany's Cacau four minutes into added time sealed a dramatic 2-2 draw to deny ten-man Poland a historic win over their neighbours in Tuesday's friendly.

Euro 2012 co-hosts Poland looked to have secured a first win over Germany at the 17th attempt when midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski - known as Kuba for short - converted a penalty in the 91st minute to make it 2-1.

But in a dramatic finale, German blushes were spared when second-half replacement Thomas Mueller fired in a cross with time almost up to allow Cacau to equalise on 94 minutes as Germany again came from behind.

Both Polish goals came from players who ply their trade with German league champions Borussia Dortmund as striker Robert Lewandowski put the hosts ahead on 55 minutes before Kuba's late penalty.

Germany midfielder Toni Kroos had put his side level on 68 minutes when he netted a dubious penalty, but the hosts were reduced to ten men when defender Arkadiusz Glowacki was sent off for a second yellow card on 80 minutes.

After Germany beat Austria 6-2 on Friday night which confirmed his side's place at Euro 2012 next June, Germany coach Joachim Loew made sweeping changes.

Vice-captain Bastian Schweinsteiger, playmaker Mesut Ozil and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer all missed the trip and Loew opted to play a 4-1-4-1 formation for the first time.

Germany's teenage star Mario Goetze joined Kroos in the middle with Lukas Podolski and Andre Schuerrle on the wings with veteran Miroslav Klose up front, but the experiment so nearly back-fired.

Polish coach Franciszek Smuda named 21-year-old Arsenal goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny, who was outstanding.

Dortmund's Kuba, fellow goal-scorer Lewandowski and Cologne's Slawomir Peszko were constant thorns in the German defence.

Poland took the lead at the sold-out PGE Arena when Kuba's pass split the defence allowing Lewandowski to hold his nerve to fire home.

Germany were lucky to be awarded a penalty when Podolski's replacement Thomas Mueller was sent tumbling and Italian referee Daniele Orsato pointed to the spot.

The replay showed there was no contact between Mueller and Glowacki, but Kroos drilled home the spot kick on 68 minutes.

Szczesny capped a fine performance when he pulled off a superb save to deny Schuerrle's long-range shot with 15 minutes left.

Having been shown a yellow for the foul on Mueller, Glowacki was shown a red for bringing down Goetze to leave Poland with ten men for the last ten minutes.

The game took a dramatic twist when Wiese brought down replacement striker Pawel Brozek with time almost up and Kuba hammered home the spot-kick much to the Polish fans' delight.

But Loew has plenty to thank Mueller for after his perfectly-timed cross allowed Cacau to get Germany out of jail.

SPORTS POLL

Where do you plan to greet Lionel Messi?

BNS 44.9%
Airport 25.6%
Hotel 17.9%
Training 68.3%

TOTAL VOTES: 78

WEEKLY QUESTION

Should Sachin Tendulkar quite ODI cricket?

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TEN Sports

Sri Lanka v Australia

Second Test, Day 1

Live from 10:30am

US Open

Men's Qtrs & Mixed Doubles Final

Live from 9:00pm

TEN Cricket

Sri Lanka v Australia

First ODI

Live from 1:30pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News



PHOTO: AFP

Australia midfielder Luke Wilkshire (R) celebrates the third goal with teammate Brett Holman during their 2014 World Cup qualifier against Saudi Arabia in Dammam on Tuesday.

Aussies trump Saudis

AFP, Hong Kong



Iraq, Thailand and Australia were comfortable winners in Asian World Cup qualifying on Tuesday, while North Korea laboured to a 1-0 home victory over Tajikistan to get their first points on the board.

Former Asian Cup winners Iraq beat Singapore 2-0 away in Group A but wasted several chances in a foul-tempered match that concluded in a row between players and officials from both benches.

Iraq pressured the Singapore goal from the start, laying siege for long periods, but wayward finishing and determined defending kept the scoreline level at half-time.

Iraq's persistence finally paid off in the 49th minute when forward Ala'a Abdulzehra put them ahead with a bullet header that beat keeper Lionel Lewis.

Lewis, a replacement for the injured Izwan Mahbud, pulled off a string of vital saves to prevent Singapore going further behind.

But Iraq put the game to bed in the 85th minute after a seemingly innocuous chip by prolific Iraqi striker Younus Mahmood sailed past a rooted Lewis and bounced into the goal.

Later in Amman, China fell 2-1 to Jordan.

In Group D, Thailand were easy 3-0 winners over Oman in Bangkok to get their qualification campaign back on track.

In Dammam, Australia came away with an impressive 3-1 win over Saudi Arabia. Joshua Kennedy gave the visitors the lead before the break, and added a second on 56 minutes.

Saudi Arabia's Nassir Al Shamrani reduced the deficit nine minutes later with Luke Wilkshire wrapping up the three points from the penalty spot.

In Group C, North Korea put in a disappointing display as they edged out the Tajiks in Pyongyang.

A solitary Pak Nam-Chol goal was enough to give the hosts their first win in the third qualifying round.

The second Group C game saw Uzbekistan and Asian giants Japan share the points 1-1.

Uzbekistan midfielder Server Djeparov opened the scoring early on only for Shinji Okazaki to equalise for Japan after the break.

The result leaves the sides level on four points at the top of the group after two rounds of games.

North Korea, who beat Tajikistan 1-0 earlier on Tuesday, sit third on three points, with Tajikistan still to get off the mark.

In Group E Bahrain ran out 2-0 winners over Indonesia in Jakarta, Sayed Dhiya Saeed Ebrahim on 45 minutes and Abdulatif Ismaeel on 72 doing the damage for the away side, while Qatar drew 1-1 with Iran.

Strecko Katanec was sacked as coach of the United Arab Emirates following their second successive 2014 World Cup qualifying defeat in a matter of days.

The 48-year-old Slovenian - who had been in the job since June 2009 - was fired after the UAE went down to a 3-1 away defeat by Group B rivals Lebanon which followed last Friday's 3-2 loss at home to Kuwait.

The other Group B tie ended in a 1-1 draw between Kuwait and South Korea in Kuwait City.