



PHOTO: REUTERS
Argentina striker Gonzalo Higuain celebrates his hat-trick goal against Chile during their 2014 World Cup qualifier in Buenos Aires on Friday.

Higuain lifts gloom



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina lifted the gloom from a poor Copa America by routing Chile 4-1 in their opening 2014 World Cup qualifier on Friday, while Uruguay also scored four to get their campaign off to a good start.

Gonzalo Higuain scored a hat-trick and Lionel Messi ended a 30-month drought for his country in competitive internationals, while Uruguay captain Diego Lugano scored twice in a 4-2 home victory over Bolivia.

Striker Paolo Guerrero got a double as Peru beat Paraguay 2-0 in Lima while Ecuador beat Venezuela by the same score in Quito, Colombia had a bye and Brazil, exempt from qualifying as tournament hosts, played Costa Rica in a friendly in San Jose.

Argentina got off to a fast start when the defence cleared a poor free kick by Waldo Ponce and Angel Di Maria raced down to the other end where he passed to Higuain to open the scoring.

Higuain laid on the 25th-minute second

goal for Messi, who had last scored for Argentina in a competitive match against Venezuela in Buenos Aires in March 2009, a 30-month period during which he went goalless in five World Cup matches and four in the Copa America.

Higuain added two more in the second half for his hat-trick and midfielder Matias Fernandez pulled one back on the hour for Chile, who had beaten Argentina for the first time in their previous meeting in Santiago in October 2008.

RESULTS

Peru 2 (Guerrero 47, 73) Paraguay 0
Argentina 4 (Higuain 7, 52, 63, Messi 25) Chile 1 (Fernandez 60)
Uruguay 4 (Suarez 3, Lugano 25, 71, Cavani 34) Bolivia 2 (Cardozo 17, Martins 87pen)
Ecuador 2 (Ayovi 14, Benitez 27) Venezuela 0

South American champions Uruguay, playing in a half-empty Centenario on a cold and rainy evening, ran up a 3-1 halftime lead after a third-minute opener from striker Luis Suarez.

Rudy Cardozo stunned Uruguay with a 17th minute equaliser before Lugano headed the home side back in front from Diego Forlan's 25th-minute free kick.

Edinson Cavani headed Uruguay's third from Maxi Pereira's cross and Lugano tapped in the fourth in the 71st when goalkeeper Carlos Arias could not hold Forlan's shot.

Bolivia striker Marcelo Martins pulled another goal back with a late penalty.

Guerrero, top scorer at the Copa America

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French injury list grows

REUTERS, Paris

Defenders Patrice Evra and Adil Rami and midfielder Yohan Cabaye picked up knocks in the 3-0 Euro 2012 qualifying win over Albania on Friday to add to France's growing injury list.

France consolidated top spot in Group D and will qualify automatically for the finals with at least a draw in their final match at home to second-placed Bosnia on Tuesday.

"We can say we're unlucky injury wise," coach Laurent Blanc told a news conference.

France were already without the injured Karim Benzema, Frank Ribery, Eric Abidal, Bacary Sagna, Kevin Gameiro and Blaise Matuidi for Friday's game.

Evra and Rami picked up thigh injuries against Albania while midfielder Cabaye suffered an ankle injury, said Blanc, who could not yet say whether the trio would be fit to face Bosnia.

Abidal, who was ruled out for Friday's game with a thigh injury, could be back on Tuesday but Blanc will not rush the Barcelona defender.

T&T lost in Bermuda

REUTERS, Undated



Trinidad and Tobago suffered a shock 2-1 defeat to Bermuda in World Cup qualifying for the CONCACAF region on Friday while Canada romped to a 7-0 win in St. Lucia.

Trinidad, who qualified for the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany, continued their miserable decline with a loss to opponents ranked 187th in the world.

Second half goals from Antwan Russell and Nahki Wells put Bermuda 2-0 up and although Kevin Molino scored for the visitors nine minutes from the end it was too late to stop the embarrassing loss for German Otto Pfister's team.

Bermuda have never made it close to qualifying for a World Cup and indeed have never even made it to the regional CONCACAF Gold Cup.

The defeat puts Trinidad at risk of failing to reach the third round of qualifying when the major regional powers, including Mexico and the United States, join the fray.

Guyana moved above Trinidad to the top of Group B after they enjoyed a 2-0 win away to Barbados with late goals from Anthony Abrams and Chris Nurse securing the win for the Golden Jaguars.

Canada enjoyed their trip to the Caribbean with Norwich City's Simeon Jackson scoring a first half hat-trick while Olivier Okean and Iain Hume scored two each in the rout.

Panama enjoyed a 5-0 win at Dominica with Amir Waithe scoring twice while El Salvador were made to fight for the three points in the Dominican Republic -- a 67th minute goal from Mark Blanco grabbing the win.

The six group winners in the current second stage of qualifying go through to face the top-six ranked teams in the region in the third phase.

The top three teams at the end of the fourth phase of qualifying, involving six teams, will qualify for the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil with the fourth placed team heading into a playoff with the top team from Oceania.

Trouble mars Euro qualifier

AP, Athens

The Euro 2012 qualifier between Greece and Croatia was temporarily suspended less than three minutes after kickoff on Friday when over 100 masked individuals entered a stand and attacked the Croatia supporters.

The group, some wearing motorcycle helmets, threw flares and at least one petrol bomb in their direction. Some Croatia fans responded by ripping off seats and throwing them at their attackers.

Greece's Portuguese coach Fernando Santos and the team captain Giorgos Karagounis were seen signalling to that part of the stadium to try to restore calm.

The game resumed after a six-minute interruption, but the Croat supporters, said to number about 700, continued ripping seats and throwing them at riot police, who responded with pepper spray. The incident was over within minutes and there was no further trouble in the game, which Greece won 2-0.

Police are looking for a security employee who allegedly opened the gate and let the masked men inside the Karaiskakis Stadium, where the qualifier took place.

GER, ESP, NED stay perfect

England qualify despite draw

REUTERS, Manchester



Germany, Spain, Netherlands and Italy had already qualified for next year's tournament, all added points to their tallies on Friday.

The Germans made it nine wins out of nine, beating Turkey 3-1 away in Group A.

That result meant their opponents dropped to third place, one point below Belgium who thrashed Kazakhstan 4-1 but who must now visit the Germans on Tuesday in their final game while Turkey host lowly Azerbaijan.

World and European champions Spain struck early to take all the points in Prague with a 2-0 win over Czech Republic, denting their hosts' chances of taking the runners-up spot in Group I.

The Czechs stayed second with 10 points although Scotland, two points behind, should overtake them when they visit Liechtenstein on Saturday. The Scots then travel to Spain on Tuesday with the Czechs away to Lithuania.

Netherlands secured top spot in Group E when a Klaas-Jan Huntelaar goal shortly before halftime gave them a 1-0 win over Moldova, while Sweden made sure of second place in that group with a 2-1 victory over Finland.

Group C winners Italy took a first-minute lead with a Claudio Marchisio goal in Belgrade before Serbia fought back through Branislav Ivanovic's 26th minute effort to

snatch a 1-1 draw that kept alive the hosts' hopes of a playoff berth.

The match passed off peacefully after Serbia lost the reverse fixture in Genoa by a 3-0 walkover due to crowd trouble and the result left Vladimir Petrovic's side needing to beat Slovenia away in their last game to finish second.

Just a point separates leaders France and Bosnia in Group D after the former beat Albania 3-0 and the latter thumped Luxembourg 5-0 to set up a mouth-watering shootout between the top two next week.

Travel plans are also not certain for the teams in Group H after Denmark crushed Cyprus 4-1 and Portugal beat Iceland 5-3.

That left the Danes and Portuguese level at the top on 16 points with the two meeting in their final match in Copenhagen on Tuesday.

England booked a place at the Euro 2012 finals on Friday with a 2-2 draw in Montenegro although Russia are virtually there after snatching a 1-0 win in Slovakia.

The Russians need only a point against rank outsiders Andorra on Tuesday to win Group B.

The battle for supremacy in Group F will also be determined on Tuesday after Greece beat Croatia 2-0 to leapfrog their rivals into top spot.

The fifth remaining automatic berth will go to the best runner-up with the other second-placed teams entering a two-legged playoff for the tournament's remaining four spots.

RESULTS

Turkey 1 (Balta 78) **Germany 3** (Gomez 35, Mueller 65, Schweinsteiger 86pen)
Slovakia 0 **Russia 1** (Dzagoev 71)
Andorra 0 **Ireland 2** (Doyle 8, McGeedy 20)
Serbia 1 (Ivanovic 26) Italy 1 (Marchisio 1)
France 3 (Malouda 11, Remy 38, Reveillere 67) Albania 0
Netherlands 1 (Huntelaar 40) Moldova 0
Greece 2 (Samaras 71, Gekas 79) Croatia 0
Montenegro 2 (Zverotic 45, Delibasic 90) England 2 (Young 11, Bent 31)
Portugal 5 (Nani 13, 21, Postiga 44, Moutinho 81, Eliseu 87) Iceland 3 (Jonasson 48, 68, Sigurdsson 90pen)
Czech Republic 0 **Spain 2** (Mata 7, Alonso 23)

Rooney sees red

AFP, Undated



Fabio Capello is preparing for life without Wayne Rooney after the striker's dismissal marred England's successful qualification for Euro 2012.

Rooney was shown a straight red card for violent conduct after aiming a needless and petulant kick at Montenegrin defender Miodrag Dzulovic during England's 2-2 draw at the Gradski Stadium on Friday.

Rooney's sending off capped a miserable week for the player following the arrest on Thursday of his father and uncle in connection with allegations of a football betting scam.

But more seriously for Capello, Rooney's moment of madness means England will kick off their campaign in Poland and Ukraine next summer with their most important player serving a suspension.

Rooney's red card also reopens all the old question marks about the striker's temperament, echoing his 2006 World Cup quarterfinal dismissal for a similarly reckless foul on Portugal's Ricardo Carvalho.

An unhappy Capello said Rooney had been guilty of a "silly" mistake, and revealed Friday that he plans to use next month's friendly against world champions Spain at Wembley as an opportunity to plan for the player's absence.

"I think all the players are important. But we will find the solution to play without him. We will try something the next game, the next friendly game that we play," the Italian said.

Capello however defended his decision to play Rooney, just a day after the allegations

concerning his relatives had emerged.

"(Rooney) made a silly mistake when he kicked the opponent. And he will not play the first match of the Euros because he'll be suspended," Capello said.

"He was not happy because he missed some control and some passes and I think it was for this reason that he kicked the opponent."

Capello admitted however that Rooney's behaviour was indefensible.

"It's a red card. I can't defend that. I'm not happy. Absolutely. I spoke with him, he made a silly mistake. He said 'yes, sorry'," Capello said.

"He's a really important player, he's got a lot of experience, he's played a lot of important games. But it was a silly mistake. What can you do?"

"I've seen really important players make silly mistakes before. At that moment you can't understand why this happened."

And a clearly exasperated Capello admitted he was powerless to rein in Rooney's temperament once a match got under way.

"I can speak with him before, but there is nothing I can do when he's playing the game," he said.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Referee Wolfgang Stark (L) sends off England star Wayne Rooney (R) during their Euro 2012 qualifier against Montenegro in Podgorica on Friday.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Are two practice Twenty20 matches enough for the Tigers?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote
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What to WATCH

ESPN & STAR Cricket
CLT20 Final
Bangalore v West Indies XI
Live from 8:30pm
TEN Sports
Japan Open
Final
Live from 11:00am
STAR Sports
F1 World Championship
Japanese Grand Prix
Live from 11:45am
China Open
Final
Live from 2:30pm

DAY'S EVENT
T20 Warmup Match
BCB XI v West Indies XI
Venue: Fatullah Stadium
Time: 1:00pm