

## Alarming slump for Portugal

REUTERS, Lisbon

Portugal missed several chances, including a Cristiano Ronaldo penalty, and were whistled off the pitch after losing 3-1 at home to Turkey on Saturday in their last friendly before Euro 2012.

The hosts started aggressively, pressed high up the pitch and seemed to be in control of the match until the defence was caught napping by Turkey winger Sercan Sararer who set up Umut Bulut for a tap-in after 35 minutes.

Portugal striker Hugo Almeida did little to appease the sell-out 65,000 crowd at the Luz stadium when he misplaced a pass to a team mate when it seemed easier to shoot.

The Turks, who failed to qualify for the Euros, were hardly brilliant but did at least take their chances.

Bulut added salt to Portugal's wounds by drilling in the second goal in the 52nd minute after taking advantage of a careless ball from Miguel Veloso.

Portugal pulled one back five minutes later after a flowing move ended in a fine finish from Nani and captain Ronaldo then missed from the spot in the 65th minute following a foul on right back Miguel Lopes.

Many home fans started drifting home before Turkey's third goal came when Ricardo Costa's goalline clearance rebounded off Pepe into the net.

## Cahill out of Euro 2012

AFP, London

England defender Gary Cahill has been ruled out of Euro 2012 with a double fracture of the jaw, the Football Association (FA) announced Sunday.

Cahill suffered the injury when he was shoved in the back by Belgium's Dries Mertens during the first half of a 1-0 international friendly win at Wembley on Saturday and as a result, collided with England goalkeeper Joe Hart.

He was sent for X-rays and now the luckless Chelsea centre-back has become the third player to drop out of England manager Roy Hodgson's squad this week after midfielders Gareth Barry and Frank Lampard's hopes of playing in Poland and Ukraine were dashed by injury.

Liverpool's Martin Kelly was called up Sunday as a replacement, with Hodgson having already omitted veteran Manchester United centre-back Rio Ferdinand from his original squad.



Argentina forward Kun Aguero is ecstatic after scoring during Argentina's 4-0 rout of Ecuador in their World Cup 2014 qualifying match at the Monumental in Buenos Aires on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Platini tips Spain, Germany Argentina race out of the blocks

AFP, Paris



EURO 2012  
POLAND-UKRAINE

UEFA president

Michel Platini told AFP in an exclusive interview.

The 56-year-old - who has had to put up with critical headlines ahead of the kick-off on June 8 over fears of racism and claims of poor ticket sales in both host countries Poland and Ukraine - explained the Spanish and the Germans had that bit extra than their 14 other rivals.

"In terms of favourites, I always make the difference between those who can win and those who are difficult to beat," said the former French football great, who still holds the record for goals scored in a Euro - nine in the 1984 edition which the French won.

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Holders Spain and Germany are likely to battle out the Euro final for a second successive time

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Italy and France will be tough, one shouldn't forget that Greece won in 2004."

Platini, who coached France at the 1992 Euros where they failed to impress, highlighted where he felt the Germans and the Spanish had the ace over their rivals.

"Spain has huge experience, Germany is a little younger, and is hungry for success," said Platini.

"Spain would like to retain their title with an outstanding generation of players.

"We will see extraordinary matches with teams who came through qualifying without dropping a point, and with players that are extremely strong.

"But is not for nothing that they (Spain) have already won it."

"At the last World Cup Germany made a good impression, but came across a good Spanish side in the World Cup semi-finals to whom they lost.

"It is evident that these two sides have something extra."

Platini, who said the Dutch were just behind those two but needed to step up from being perennial

contenders, said he felt that England would suffer more from the absence of striker Wayne Rooney in their first two games - he is suspended - than the sudden departure of coach Fabio Capello in February.

Capello, who had guided England to the finals after a disappointing performance at the World Cup finals, has since been replaced by the well-travelled Roy Hodgson.

"I think that the absence of Rooney for the first two games is much more of a handicap than the departure of Capello. Rooney is one of the best players in the world."

Platini, who has been in his present post since 2007, said that obviously it would be better for the host countries to stay in the competition as long as possible in order to keep local interest burning.

"We have to be neutral, us the organisers. When the local team is in the competition for a long time, there is a better atmosphere, more passion, that is true, it is a fact.

"But it is a competition, may the best team win."

REUTERS, Buenos Aires



FIFA WORLD CUP

Argentina's decision to play their four world class forwards was fully justified in a crushing 4-0 win over Ecuador that put them top of the South American World Cup qualifiers on Saturday.

Sergio Aguero, Gonzalo Higuain, Lionel Messi and Angel Di Maria all scored in the victory as the home side scored three goals in a devastating 11 minute period in the first half that settled the outcome.

Messi, replicating his Barcelona form more and more with each match for his country, was brilliant and may well have finally won over the crowd at the Monumental in Buenos Aires.

"We have to be a solid team, structured in defence and accompany Lionel so he can express himself to the full," coach Alejandro Sabella told the post-match news conference.

Argentina lead the South American group with 10 points from five matches, one more

point than Chile, who beat Bolivia 2-0 in La Paz, and two ahead of Uruguay and Venezuela who drew 1-1 in Montevideo.

However, Argentina can be overtaken next weekend when they have a bye which they will spend playing arch-rivals and 2014 World Cup hosts Brazil in a friendly in the United States.

Copa America holders Uruguay failed to end their Venezuela jinx, going a fifth World Cup qualifier in succession without beating the region's former whipping boys.

Diego Forlan put Uruguay ahead at the Centenario when he extended his national scoring record to 33 in the 39th minute.

But, with little more than five minutes left, a header by Venezuela striker Jose Salomon Rondon was helped into his own net by defender Diego Godin.

"Rondon hits it and it hits me," Godin told reporters who asked him whether he thought it was an own goal, as initially given by the South American Football Confederation.

"None of us are pleased with what we showed," Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez told reporters speaking for the players and

## Injuries mar England win

Football

REUTERS, London

England completed their preparations for Euro 2012 when a Danny Welbeck goal sealed a 1-0 win over Belgium in a friendly at Wembley on Saturday to give new manager Roy Hodgson his second successive victory since being appointed last month.

Welbeck scored his first senior England goal after 36 minutes when he dinked the ball over goalkeeper Simon Mignolet after a precise through pass from Ashley Young.

There were injury concerns for Hodgson's central defenders, however, with Gary Cahill going off after clattering into his own goalkeeper Joe Hart when he was shoved in the back after 17 minutes by Dries Mertens who was booked for the challenge.

Cahill will undergo a scan after fears he may have suffered a broken jaw. John Terry will also require a scan, according to Hodgson, after tweaking a hamstring.

Cahill and Terry's Chelsea team mate Frank Lampard has already been ruled out with a thigh injury while fellow midfielder Gareth Barry is another player ruled out of Hodgson's squad with a groin injury.

In a largely low-key pre-tournament friendly, Belgium dominated much of the possession but England did enough to win their second successive match 1-0 following last week's friendly in Oslo against Norway.

Both teams went close to scoring late in the game with Belgian defender Guillaume Gillet sending a fierce angled drive against the England post and England substitute Jermain Defoe hitting the post at the other end.

England started with only four of the players who began in Norway - captain Steven Gerrard, James Milner, Scott Parker and Oslo scorer Young with Hodgson employing a rigid 4-4-2 system against a more fluid Belgian team.

EURO 2012  
PREVIEW

## Aiming for history

AFP, Madrid

Spain head to Euro 2012 looking to make history but their bid for a third consecutive major tournament triumph could be hit by fatigue, with top players feeling the effects of several years competing at the highest level.

Spain were the big underachievers of the European game before their triumph at Euro 2008 but having since gone on to win the 2010 World Cup they will be the team to beat in Poland and Ukraine.

No team has ever retained the Henri Delaunay trophy or won three major tournaments on the bounce, even if West Germany came close, losing the 1976 European Championship to Czechoslovakia after previously winning the 1972 Euros and the 1974 World Cup.

There are plenty of reasons why Vicente Del Bosque's side can hope to go all the way this year, though, especially as their leading players know each other inside out and are not lacking in experience.

They also cruised through qualifying, winning all eight games and scoring 26 goals in the process.

"The entire team know that as the reigning European champions the heavy weight of responsibility lies on our shoulders," Del Bosque said recently.

"But everyone in the team wants to defend our



current position in world football even if this task looks tricky. We can be proud of what we have achieved but it belongs in the past and now we need to focus on the future."

However, Del Bosque must solve some major problems if La Roja are to really compete with the youthful exuberance of Germany and the class of

the Netherlands, among others.

Chief among those is the fatigue, both physical and mental, which has accumulated over the years of success.

Barcelona's Xavi Hernandez is the man that makes the team tick but he has played an average of almost 70 games a season in the last four years and is being gradually worn down by tendon problems.

And Xavi is far from the only one to have clocked up the kilometres in recent years with little or no rest.

Furthermore, many of Del Bosque's squad will come from Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao, the two clubs who meet in the final of the Copa del Rey on May 25, just 16 days before La Roja's opening game against Italy.

That means Del Bosque will be the last coach to have his whole group of players at his disposal ahead of the tournament.

To compound matters, he has also had to deal with the loss of key players to injury.

## Dutch hit their stride

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Robin van Persie and Ibrahim Afellay scored two goals apiece on Saturday to inspire Netherlands to a 6-0 thrashing of Northern Ireland in their final Euro 2012 warmup friendly.

Fielding a team that is likely to be coach Bert van Marwijk's starting lineup in Ukraine and Poland, apart from the injured Joris Mathijsen, the Dutch took the Irish apart.

Van Persie opened the scoring after 11 minutes with a near-post header and added his second from the penalty spot after Wesley Sneijder had doubled the lead with a curling free kick.

Afellay, who has been out for most of the season with a bad knee injury, finished off a fine move involving Van Persie and Arjen Robben to make it 4-0 by halftime.

The Dutch added a fifth through Afellay in the 51st minute before central defender Ron Vlaar completed the rout with a close-range header 12 minutes from time.

"I'm satisfied with the execution of our tactical plan today but the score means little to me as they were very poor opponents," Van Marwijk told reporters.

"My main concern is at left back because Giovanni van Bronckhorst is now retired and his successor Erik Pieters is injured."

## Lazio rope in Petkovic

REUTERS, Rome

Former Sion coach Vladimir Petkovic was named Lazio boss on Saturday after Edy Reja opted to step down despite another successful Serie A season.

Bosnian Petkovic, who spent a short spell at Switzerland's troubled Sion this year, is a surprise choice given he has never been involved in Italian football having spent most of his time managing an array of Swiss teams.

A short statement on Lazio's website confirmed his appointment but there were no details on the length of contract.

Rome's Lazio were almost relegated three seasons ago when Reja took over but he led the club into Europe the next term and in the season just finished they narrowly missed the Champions League spots by finishing fourth.

However, Reja had a rocky relationship with hard-nosed president Claudio Lotito and previously offered to resign before finally walking away last month.

**SPORTS POLL**  
**WEEKLY QUESTION**  
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**Bangladesh Premier League**  
Sk Russel v Abahani  
Time: 5:30pm  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium  
Team BJMC v Soccer Club, Feni  
Time: 4:00pm