

A clash of styles



ITALY
8 WINS

HEAD TO HEAD
Played: 25
Draws 10



SPAIN
7 WINS

REUTERS, Gniewino

Spain will go into Sunday's Group C opener against old foes Italy with a swagger that was missing from past encounters after a pivotal moment in their rivalry four years ago.

It is widely accepted that the moment the Spanish turned from underachievers into an all-conquering outfit was when Cesc Fabregas stroked in the decisive penalty in the quarterfinal shootout against the Italians at Euro 2008.

Italy had been something of a bogey team for Spain until then but, four years later and with continental and world titles under their belts, Vicente del Bosque's side now hold the upper hand.

"I think it changed the mentality of the national team," central defender Gerard Pique, who was watching Euro 2008 on holiday in Majorca, told a news conference at Spain's training base in Gniewino, Poland on Friday.

"Before Spain played to avoid losing but afterwards they played to win," the 25-year-old said.

Striker Fernando Llorente, who also watched the match in Vienna on television from Spain, added: "It was a turning point.

"Beating Italy and getting to the semi-finals made us believe in ourselves. After that, we knew we could win and do something historic."

Neither side has had the ideal preparation for the 2012 edition co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine but it would still be a major surprise if either failed to get through a group that also features Croatia and Ireland.

Bidding to become the first nation to win back-to-back continental titles with a World Cup in between, Spain have lost record scorer David Villa and inspirational centre back Carlos Puyol to injury.

Villa's likely replacement at centre forward, Fernando Torres, is still recovering from a spectacular loss of form over the past 18 months, while the central defensive pairing of Pique and Sergio Ramos is relatively untested.

Italy, meanwhile, are mired in yet another domestic match fixing scandal that has deprived them of Domenico Criscito after the defender was placed under investigation by police.

The disruption appeared to have affected their form on the pitch as they slipped to a 3-0 reverse against Russia in their final warm-up game on June 1, a third straight friendly defeat under coach Cesare Prandelli.

"It's normal to be worried," midfielder Thiago Motta told reporters on Thursday at Italy's training base in Krakow.

"Three defeats, even in friendlies, is not normal for a team like us," added the former Barcelona player.



Russia forward Alan Dzagoev (R) celebrates one of his two goals against the Czech Republic during their Euro 2012 encounter in Wroclaw on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Ukraine, Russian fans scuffle

REUTERS, Lviv

Russian and Ukrainian soccer fans scuffled briefly in the streets of Lviv in the early hours of Saturday after watching a Euro 2012 game in the city's fan zone, eyewitnesses said.

Around 15 Russian fans, delighted at their side's impressive 4-1 win over the Czech Republic, left the zone and started shouting and swearing at a smaller group of Ukrainians, said Reuters photographer Marian Strlitsiv.

The two sides exchanged a few punches before local police quickly moved in and separated the combatants. No arrests were made.

One picture taken by a local agency showed a man with blood streaming from his nose. Police denied there had been any violence and said they had prevented the two sides from fighting. Tensions between the two nationalities are particularly high in Lviv, in the far west of the country, in part because of Ukrainian resentment at Soviet rule from 1939 to 1991.

The Lviv region was the centre of a resistance campaign by Ukrainian nationalists fighting for independence from the Soviet Union during and after World War Two.

Russia vanquish Czech

REUTERS, Wroclaw

Russia produced the sort of football purists dream of and gave the Czech Republic a lesson in moving the ball quickly, effectively and beautifully on Friday as they announced themselves as potential Euro 2012 challengers.

Alan Dzagoyev scored twice in the 4-1 triumph in their Group A opener but little maestro Andrei Arshavin took many of the plaudits for threading the sort of cute little passes which give nightmares to cumbersome defenders.

Odds were quickly slashed on Dick Advocaat's men winning the tournament but with a long way to go and a potentially tough quarterfinal against the Germans, Dutch or Portuguese, they will have to keep this form going for a few weeks yet.

"The Czechs left some space which made us dangerous," Advocaat, a Dutchman schooled in the pass and move groove, told reporters.

"For the first game I am happy about it. Andrei played a very good game. He worked very hard. He was very important for the team the way he can play."

Asked if his side were now among the favourites, even before 12 of the 16 teams have played, Advocaat exuded the sort of realism which Russia will need if they are to avoid a repeat of their 2008 semi-final failure after being equally hyped.

"It is most important we won the first game. At the end is when you lift the trophy, not now," he said, keeping his eyes fixed on the rest of Group A - where Poland drew 1-1 with Greece earlier - rather than the final in Kiev on July 1.

The Czechs actually started the game the better, controlling possession until a quick break after 15 minutes had Russia in front.

Alexander Kerzhakov hit the post with a header, the closest he came on an otherwise profligate night in front of goal, only for Dzagoyev to coolly strike home the rebound.

It got worse for Michal Bilek's men as soon waves of Russians poured forward with the ball almost always played to feet along the slick pitch coated with a shower of rain.

The moment of the match came when Arshavin - who seemed to have lost all his mercurial powers in recent years after wowing Euro 2008 - showed their was life in the Russian bear yet with the most effortless but the most destructive pass imaginable.

Roman Shirokov then flicked the ball over goalkeeper Petr Cech with another spot of brilliance to net the second and thrill a sizeable contingent of Russians inside the impressive bowled Wroclaw stadium.

The Czech border is not so far away from the Polish host city but it was an unhappy journey back for their army of painted-faced fans after watching their side show signs of promise but little more.

Vaclav Pilar's 52nd-minute goal which made it 2-1 was well worked and briefly made a game of it.

They upped the pressure though and with the Czechs tiring, especially left back Michal Kadlec who was picked to bomb forward on every occasion but left dangerous holes, the match was put to bed in emphatic fashion.

The craft and the guile was still present in the move for the third but Dzagoyev's thumping 79th-minute finish was a sign that Russia can also do power.

Substitute striker Roman Pavlyuchenko, who could find himself in the starting lineup for Russia's next match against Poland in Warsaw on June 12 given Kerzhakov's wastefulness, then bamboozled the defence and buried his fierce shot into the net three minutes later for the fourth.

Barzagli stays in Italy squad

REUTERS, Krakow

Italy centre back Andrea Barzagli will remain in their Euro 2012 squad after coach Cesare Prandelli and medics decided he would be available for some of the tournament despite a calf problem.

"The scan this morning showed a noticeable improvement in the player's calf," Italy team doctor Enrico Castellacci was quoted as saying by ANSA.

"We have decided to keep him, he won't be available for the first two matches but we will try to get him fit for the third. There is silent optimism."

Italy, who face holders Spain in their Group C opener in Poland's Gdansk on Sunday, are set to use a new system with three at the back and midfielder Daniele De Rossi playing in the centre of defence, partly because of Barzagli's injury.

SPORTS POLL

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Spain striker Fernando Torres (R) dribbles past teammate Cesc Fabregas during a training session at Gniewino on Friday. The defending champions take on heavy-weight Italy tonight.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Aiming for solid start



IRELAND
2 WINS

HEAD TO HEAD
Played: 6
Draws 3



CROATIA
1 WIN

AFP, Poznan

Ireland and Croatia will be looking to make a victorious start to their Euro 2012 campaign when they meet here on Sunday, knowing that on the road ahead lie heavyweights Italy and holders Spain.

"The first 90 minutes will have an impact on the tournament. It's very important to win the first match, which would give us a certain advantage, but it would also be important not to lose," Ireland's coach Giovanni Trapattoni told uefa.com.

The Irish old guard, symbolised by 31-year-old record scorer and captain Robbie Keane and 36-year-old goalkeeper Shay Given, know this is likely to be their last international tournament.

"In any competition you want to start off as well as you can, and get points on the board," said Keane.

As both teams look to make their mark, the match also has the potential to be a clash of the coaching generations.

It pits 73-year-old Italian Trapattoni, perhaps the most successful club coach of all time, against Croatia's 43-year-old Slaven Bilic, who after six years in charge would like nothing better than to lift the trophy before he moves into club management with Russia's Lokomotiv Moscow.

However, the engaging Trapattoni makes light of the age difference.

"This is not a problem. I feel like a 20-year-old, only with more experience," said Trapattoni having conducted Friday's press conference in English, Italian and even German gained while coaching Bayern Munich in the 1990s.

"I'm still hungry for success, I watch every football match and always think of ways in which I could improve."

Irish fans' expectations are high as the boys in green return to the stage for their first major finals since the 2002 World Cup - where Given and Keane shone - having fallen controversially to France in the playoffs for the 2010 edition.

Fittingly, it was via the playoffs that Ireland earned their berth at Euro 2012, as they beat minnows Estonia to reach their first European championship since 1988.

"We are strong in our attitude, our mentality, our confidence. Without a doubt we believe in ourselves. For us, this discipline, this attitude, is very important," said Trapattoni.

Both sides will be keenly aware that much attention will be focused on Group C favourites Spain and Italy who meet the same night in the Baltic port of Gdansk.

"Spain are red-hot favourites to win the group and ourselves, Italy and Croatia are probably vying for second spot, if we're all being honest," said midfielder Keith Andrews.

রংপুরের পীরগঞ্জ উপজেলায়
জনতা ব্যাংকের
৮৭৯তম
শাখার
শুভ উদ্বোধন
১০ জুন ২০১২, রবিবার

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ব্যাংকিং কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার জন্য সাদর আমন্ত্রণ।

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