

# Poles stay in hunt



**POLAND 1: 1 RUSSIA**  
**BLASZCZYKOWSKI 57**



**DZAGOEV 37**

AFP, Warsaw

Euro 2012 co-hosts Poland kept their chances of a quarterfinals berth alive on Tuesday after drawing 1-1 with Russia, putting on ice their opponents' hopes of clinching the first slot in the knock-out phase.

The Poles, needing to take at least a point from the Group A match in the wake of their 1-1 tournament opener against Greece on Friday, were keenly aware of Russia's high-octane 4-1 performance against the Czech Republic the same night.

In what may be the most politically-charged fixture of the tournament, Poland looked the hungrier team in the first half, launching a series of convincing attacks on the Russian goal.

But they failed to capitalise on earlier chances including a slicing free kick in the seventh minute by Ludovic Obraniak, newly positioned as a left-side midfielder, with Sebastian Boenisch's attempt saved by Vyacheslav Malafeev.

Hard work appeared to have paid off when Eugen Polanski moved onto a through ball from lone striker Robert Lewandowski, who scored against the Greeks, and fired past Malafeev.

But fans and the Polish bench swung from ecstasy to misery when his 18th-minute shot was ruled offside.

A resurgent Russia picked up the pace, with captain Andrey Arshavin crossing in the 25th minute to fellow member of their striking triumvirate Aleksandr Kerzhakov, only for him to miss the target.

Polish keeper Przemyslaw Tyton - whose penalty-saving heroics after he came on as a substitute for red-carded first choice Wojciech Szczesny helped avoid a Polish defeat to Greece - saved a free kick from Arshavin a minute later.

Russia's efforts bore fruit in the 37th minute when rising star Alan Dzagoev, who notched up a double against the Czechs, latched onto an inswinging Arshavin free kick to open the scoring.

Poland, who were criticised for losing pace against Greece in the second half and throwing away their lead, returned from the dressing room keen to hurry the Russians.

While they appeared tired, they battled hard, and finally equalised in the 57th minute when captain Kuba Blaszczykowski picked up a cross from Obraniak and fired home a left-footed piledriver.

There were nervous moments for both sides in the remainder of the half, with the noise levels rising in Warsaw's brand-new National Stadium.

Russia wrap up their group matches against Greece on Saturday, when Poland face the Czechs.



Polish midfielder Jakub Blaszczykowski (C) scores the equalising goal during their Euro 2012 match against Russia at the National Stadium in Warsaw on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ibra sits out part of training

AFP, Kiev

Swedish captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic sat out part of team training on Wednesday because of a sore thigh, a legacy from Monday's opening 2-1 defeat by co-hosts Ukraine in their opening Euro 2012 Group D match.

However, the Swedish camp said that they weren't too worried about Ibrahimovic's status and that he should be fit for Friday's vital game against England.

"He took a blow to the thigh during the Ukraine game," said a member of the Swedish staff.

"Thus his not taking part was a precautionary measure, and he will undergo treatment later this afternoon.

"But there is no worry about him not being fit for Friday's match, none."

The 30-year-old AC Milan striker - who scored the Swedes goal in the Ukraine match but was at fault for the Ukrainian winner as he let Andrei Shevchenko get away from him - warmed-up with the rest of the squad and did some light work.

However, he sat out the final part of the session as he was treated by a physio and then watched his fellow forwards train.

## Azzurri plan to attack



**CROATIA**  
**3 WINS**

**HEAD TO HEAD**  
**Played: 6**  
**Draws 2**



**ITALY**  
**1 WIN**

AFP, Poznan

Antonio Cassano believes Italy coach Cesare Prandelli will continue his attacking approach as the Azzurri tackle Croatia in their second European Championship Group C match here on Thursday.

Italy surprised many people with their positive performance in a 1-1 draw with world champions Spain on Sunday as they took the game to the defending champions at times and created several scoring opportunities.

And Cassano said a return to the traditional "catenaccio" (door-bolt) style of the past is not an option under Prandelli.

"From the first day Prandelli's style has always been to attack," said the 29-year-old AC Milan forward.

"He's changed his system but his style is always to have possession and to attack.

"Against Spain we did it less because they had a lot of the ball but you saw the same idea, it didn't change from attacking."

Cassano himself is the man who leads the line but many are wondering who will play alongside him.

Errant Manchester City forward Mario Balotelli got the nod against Spain but played poorly and was replaced just before the half hour mark by Antonio Di Natale, who looked lively and scored the opener.

Prandelli has admitted he is considering dropping Balotelli in favour of Di Natale and Cassano says he has no preference as to who he plays alongside.

"The important thing is that I play," he

joked. "Whoever (Prandelli) he chooses, the problem would be if they both played and not me!"

Italy need a victory to ensure they tackle Ireland in their final group game with their destiny in their own hands as Croatia won their opening match against the Irish 3-1.

Failure to beat Croatia would mean Italy needing to beat Ireland in their final game in Poznan and hoping the result between Spain and Croatia does not cost them.

The importance of this match has not been lost on Prandelli who says he will change some things.

"What counts in the choices is the nervous and physical state of the players," he said.

"This will be the decisive match of the group. The idea is not to change too much so that we have consistency."

In the first match against Spain, Prandelli abandoned the four-man defence that conceded the least goals of any team in qualifying and reached the finals with two games to spare.

Instead he opted for a back three with wing-backs Christian Maggio and Emanuele Giaccherini working tirelessly on the flanks.

Prandelli has yet to decide what to do in his next match but says much will depend on the fitness of his players.

But he also admitted he hadn't decided who would start up front.

"Before thinking about how to tackle Croatia we have to study them well," he said.

"When we decide on how to tackle this team, we will decide on the forwards."

## Rosicky, Cech boost Czechs

AFP, Prague

Czech stars Tomas Rosicky and Petr Cech have excellent chances of being fit for their side's final Euro 2012 Group A clash against co-hosts Poland after undergoing scans on Wednesday.

Both players - two of the few remaining players still in the squad from the flair-filled Czech side that reached the Euro 2004 semi-finals - would be huge losses to the Czechs were they unable to play.

"We could see them both play (against Poland on Saturday) in the end. There's a big chance," the website of the DNES broadsheet quoted chief team doctor Petr Krejci as saying after the scans.

There had been serious concern over the injury-prone Rosicky, who was unable to come back out for the second-half of the crucial 2-1 win over Greece on Tuesday because of a sore Achilles tendon.

The scan, though, showed no damage to either the tendon or the tissue according to Krejci.

Chelsea keeper Cech took over the captaincy after Rosicky failed to come back out for the second-half and finished the game with a

## A sense of deja vu



**SPAIN**  
**14 WINS**

**HEAD TO HEAD**  
**Played: 25**  
**Draws 7**

**IRELAND**  
**4 WINS**



REUTERS, Gdynia

Spain's sizeable Barcelona contingent may be forgiven for feeling a sense of deja vu when they face Ireland on Thursday in their second Group B match at Euro 2012.

Just as Barca did in the Champions League semifinal against Chelsea, the European and world champions will likely spend huge chunks of the game with the ball at their feet, plotting and scheming a way through a forest of opposing defenders.

After misfiring in a 1-1 draw against Italy, when coach Vicente del Bosque refrained from using a specialist striker until Chelsea's unlikely Nou Camp hero Fernando Torres came on 15 minutes from time, Spain desperately need a win.

The prospect of a green barricade in front of them in Gdansk could be the source of unease, even more so because of the recent trend favouring teams who sit back in their own half and soak up punishment.

Chelsea also did it against Bayern Munich in the final, Denmark succeeded with it against the Netherlands and England, to a lesser extent, used the tactic against France as they eked out a 1-1 draw.

Boxing great Muhammad Ali's famous "rope-a-dope" tactics that slowly extinguished George Foreman's fire all those years ago seems to be catching on in football and Ireland will be hoping to avoid a knock-out blow after a 3-1 loss to Croatia.

Spain midfielder Sergio Busquets, one of the Barca players driven to distraction by

Chelsea, knows exactly what to expect.

"Patience will be key," he told reporters at Spain's training base in Gniewino on Tuesday.

"The most important thing is our style and philosophy. We will try to control possession and play the ball around quickly."

"Hopefully we can score an early goal to settle ourselves and maybe then they will have to open up a bit more."

Giovanni Trapattoni's Ireland are 10-1 with bookmakers to win the game but Busquets warned against predictions of a one-sided contest.

"In the finals of a competition like this no team will gift you anything and there are not going to be any thrashings handed out," he said. "At the last World Cup, for example, the matches were decided by one goal."

Trapattoni, Ireland's wily 73-year-old coach, expects Spain to operate with a striker, probably in the form of Torres, a former Liverpool team mate of Ireland's record scorer Robbie Keane.

"He is a great player and great guy too," said Keane at Ireland's training base in Gdynia.

"I'm not sure if he will play but whether he does, or they play with six midfielders it doesn't matter because they have so much quality in their side."

Keane, who could find himself up front alongside Jonathan Walters with Kevin Doyle dropping to the bench, said there were parallels between Chelsea's task and the one they face.



Polish anti-riot policemen detain a Poland fan after clashes with Russian fans in Warsaw on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Riots in Warsaw

REUTERS, Warsaw

Riot police fired teargas and rubber bullets at Polish and Russian football fans who fought bloody battles near a Warsaw stadium on Tuesday, bringing the rocky relationship between the two to the forefront hours before their Euro 2012 match.

Groups of young men, some of them masked, pelted Polish officers with rocks, bottles and flares. Television footage showed one man lying motionless on the ground, but Poland's Interior Ministry denied media reports that one person died.

Fearing further violence, police asked the 9,850 Russian supporters who watched their team tie Poland 1-1 to remain at the Warsaw stadium for 20 minutes to better protect them when they exit the venue.

But there were still some scuffles after the match as fans returned into the city centre from the stadium, but they were limited in extent and not nearly as violent as before the match.

Authorities had been bracing for a confrontation at the game between the neighbouring countries, whose relations have been poisoned by centuries of conflict and the Soviet domination of Poland for more than four decades after World War Two.

Riot police were seen dragging people off as Polish fans chanted: "Russia whores, Russia whores" and "Hit the red trash with a hammer, with a sickle".

Some Poles displayed a banner saying: "Polish President murdered in Russia," referring to a plane crash in Russia two years ago that killed Poland's president and 95 others.

At least 120 people were detained and 11 people, mostly Poles, needed medical treatment, though none of the injuries were life threatening, the Interior Ministry said. Officers used water cannon, teargas and rubber bullets, a police spokesman said.

Violence erupted as thousands of Russian fans, flanked by police, crossed the Vistula river on the way to the stadium.

Groups of fans began to provoke each other with insults then small groups started to scuffle. Reuters witnesses saw one man hit on the head by an iron bar thrown through the air.

### SPORTS POLL

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Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu