

French feel the heat


FRANCE
3 WINS

HEAD TO HEAD
Played: 6
Draws 3

UKRAINE
0 WIN


REUTERS, Kiev

France's 22-match unbeaten run will count for nothing on Friday when they will face similar challenges as they did against England in a Euro 2012 Group D clash against red-hot Ukraine in Donetsk.

Les Bleus, who have not won a game in a major championship since 2006, will have to make their presence count in the box or they could face the possibility of a third consecutive elimination in the first round after leaving Euro 2008 and the 2010 World Cup without a win.

Ukraine, in a state of euphoria after Andriy Shevchenko led them to an unexpected 2-1 win over Sweden, will qualify for the quarter-finals if they prevail and France have their backs to the wall.

Les Bleus were left frustrated after a 1-1 draw against England in their opening game and Ukraine may also sit back with two banks of four and wait to hit them on the break.

It was hot in Donetsk on Monday and the Donbass Arena is again expected to turn into an oven on Friday with temperatures reaching 33 degrees.

England scored with a header on Monday and Andriy Shevchenko showed against Sweden that Ukraine could also be a force in the air.

Against England, France "lacked pres-

ence in front of goal", coach Laurent Blanc conceded, even though they managed 15 attempts on target.

But they were hardly dangerous as Karim Benzema played in deeper zones than expected, leaving the box unoccupied.

"He did that, but he also does that with Real Madrid," said Blanc, who waited until the 84th minute to make his first substitution as he was more looking to preserve a draw rather than go for a win.

Against Ukraine, Blanc expects his players to "loosen up" and bring more speed into the danger zone.

"Being timorous is the best way to get punished," he said.

Blanc, however, is expected to field the same starting lineup than against England, just as Blokhin will possibly keep faith in the team who sent the co-host country into raptures.

But with Blokhin, who is merciless with his players, Ukraine will take nothing for granted.

"We did not expect easy games at the tournament and still have two very difficult games to play," said midfielder Anatoly Tymoshchuk.

With a resurgent Shevchenko, however, Ukraine have what it takes to beat France for the first time in seven attempts.



Germany striker Mario Gomez (L) shoots to score one of his two goals against Netherlands during their Euro 2012 Group B match at the Metalist Stadium in Kharkiv on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rommedahl to miss decider

REUTERS, Kiev

Winger Dennis Rommedahl will miss Denmark's final Euro 2012 group game against Germany due to a hamstring strain picked up in Wednesday's 3-2 defeat by Portugal.

"As it looks now, Dennis is out of the game against Germany," coach Morten Olsen told a news conference on Thursday.

"Muscle injuries like this take time."

Rommedahl - who was nowhere near his best form in the two Group B games to date - pulled up while sprinting after a ball on the hour mark and was replaced by Tobias Mikkelsen, who is likely to keep his place against Germany on Sunday.

"Tobias made a fantastic switch, he's come in with great spirit and enthusiasm for a player not used to playing at this level," Olsen added.

Spain Mourinho's favourites

REUTERS, Singapore

Holders Spain remain the team to beat at Euro 2012 despite their sluggish start against Italy but they will face competition for the title from Germany, Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho said on Thursday.

Spain came from a goal down to draw with Italy in their Group C opener but were criticised for not starting with a striker as Italy's five-man midfield stifled their creativity.

Confident predictions that Spain could become the first team to win three successive major international titles have quietened since, but Mourinho still believes in them.

"Spain is the world champion and no doubts about that," Mourinho told reporters in Singapore on Thursday.

"They are one of the best teams in the Euros, so normally, if things go in the right direction, Spain has to qualify and Spain has to go through and Spain has to compete maybe with Germany and maybe a couple of other teams to be champion of Europe."

The Portuguese did not

hold such confidence in his compatriots, who bounced back from an opening loss to Germany to beat Denmark 3-2 on Wednesday.

However, the unpredictability of the 16-team tournament gave him hope Portugal could spring a surprise and win the tournament for the first time.

"Now they don't depend on other teams they depend only on themselves so if they can do a job against Netherlands, Portugal is in the quarterfinals," Mourinho said.

"I don't think Portugal is one of the two, three best teams in the competition, but these short competitions with knockout in 90 minutes and sometimes extra time and penalties so if Portugal reach the quarterfinal anything can happen."

Bendtner in hot water

REUTERS, Undated

Denmark striker Nicklas Bendtner could face sanction by UEFA after revealing the logo of a betting company while celebrating his second goal against Portugal in their Euro 2012 clash on Wednesday.

Pictures taken by a Reuters photographer show Bendtner lifting his shirt to show the name of an Irish firm on the waistband of his underpants.

Sponsors pay millions to be associated with the European Championship and governing body UEFA has strict rules preventing ambush marketing.

A spokesperson said UEFA was investigating the matter.

Bendtner scored twice in Denmark's 3-2 defeat by Portugal in Group B, prompting a spokesman for the betting company to release a statement praising his performance and claiming credit for Bendtner's good luck.

The spokesman also said no money had changed hands with Bendtner and that the underpants have been sent to several unnamed players so could make a reappearance in the tournament.

Denmark face Germany on Sunday in their final group game as they look to reach the last eight.

'Gomez is our Drogba'

AFP, Gdansk

Hot-shot striker Mario Gomez is Germany's version of Didier Drogba, midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger said Thursday after the Bayern Munich star took his tally to three goals at Euro 2012.

Having netted with a header against Portugal on Saturday in Germany's opening Group B win, Gomez underlined his current form with two well-taken first-half goals in Wednesday's 2-1 win over Holland.

The two victories leave Germany top of Group B and on course to reach next week's quarterfinals as a point against Denmark on Sunday in Lviv, Ukraine, will guarantee the Germans win the group.

Gomez came to the European championship on the back of a stellar season after scoring 41 goals for Bayern, but has been much maligned in Germany in the past after poor performances for the national team.

Bayern lost last month's Champions League final to Chelsea on penalties after Drogba equalised for the Blues, then hit the winning spot-kick, and Schweinsteiger says Gomez is just as lethal in front of goal as the Ivory Coast star.

"The good thing with Mario is that he needs almost zero chances and still scores, just like Didier Drogba, I would put those two more or less on the same level," said Schweinsteiger with Gomez on 25 goals in 54 games for Germany.

Fight for supremacy


SWEDEN
6 WINS

HEAD TO HEAD
Played: 21
Draws 9

ENGLAND
6 WINS


REUTERS, Krakow

Roy Hodgson may wonder if he is looking into a footballing mirror in Kiev on Friday when he travels back to the future as England meet Sweden in their Euro 2012 Group D clash.

The new England manager, who began his long coaching career with a series of Swedish clubs, is fondly remembered by many of the Scandinavian nation's fans as the unofficial godfather of their national team's consistency and success.

His establishment in Sweden of an orthodox, if defensive, 4-4-2 system, based on the then-traditional England approach, was widely copied after he guided Malmö to the domestic championship in 1986 and 1988.

Having adopted a similar system, Sweden were beaten semi-finalists on home soil at Euro 92 and then finished third at the 1994 World Cup finals, achievements that followed Hodgson's two four-year spells in a country where he is still respected.

But, like Swedish counterpart Erik Hamren, Hodgson knows that football is no respecter of age or reputations, especially when it is reduced to a close contest between two teams of similar strengths and styles who know each other well.

After their 1-1 draw with France in Donetsk, England have a point in the bank and will seek to improve and snatch a decisive victory. Sweden, defeated 2-1 by co-hosts Ukraine in Kiev, know they must win to keep alive hopes of reaching the last eight.

This suggests both sides will attack and an open game is in prospect, but lovers of beautiful football should be warned that this collision of similarities is more likely to resemble an English Premier League slugfest than a purists' fiesta.

The Swedes have never lost to England in a competitive fixture - though many have

been dreary 0-0 draws - while the English may take heart from their 1-0 win at Wembley last November, their first against the Swedes since 1968.

Hodgson, however, believes he has the players and the know-how to end that spell of Swedish supremacy, even if he is forced to rotate his players with the final group game, against Ukraine in Donetsk next Tuesday, in mind.

"I will have to assess the freshness of my team and see whether they are able to do it again," said Hodgson this week.

"Scott Parker and Steven Gerrard are both over 30 and had to work really hard (against France). I'm not the only coach wondering, 'Can they do it every four days?'"

In that light - and with no real injury concerns - Hodgson may bring in Jordan Henderson for Parker, alongside captain Gerrard, and leave out winger Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, 18, as he seeks to preserve the balance in midfield.

"But," he added, "my gut feeling, after a good recovery day on Tuesday, a sensible training day on Wednesday and sensible recovery day on Thursday, is that it will be very hard for me to leave people out..."

Hodgson also knows that suspended striker Wayne Rooney will be available for the Ukraine game when he may be in a better position to make changes to his team lineup. If all that gives Sweden few clues, it will make little difference to their approach as Hamren also considers consolidating his midfield by recalling veteran Anders Svensson.

He may also draft in Johan Elmander up front to give Zlatan Ibrahimovic more freedom to roam.

"We're going to try to go a long way in this tournament, but now it's cup matches," said Hamren. "It's a cup match against England - it's win or bust."

Merkel wears orange

REUTERS, Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel donned a pale orange blazer to work on Wednesday to Dutch delight and German disbelief, as both countries braced for their Euro 2012 soccer match in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

"Today of all days!", exclaimed German newspaper Bild on its website. "How could you?"

Dutch media revelled in Merkel's choice of their national colour. "Is Merkel a secret fan of the Dutch?", asked paper NRC Handelsblad.

The two nations have enjoyed a long-standing rivalry on the pitch since the emergence of the Dutch as a global football powerhouse in the 1970s, particularly after Germany's 2-1 final victory at the 1974 World Cup.

Merkel is a fervent supporter of the German team, often seen wildly cheering in the stands, as she did during the previous European championship in 2008 in Austria and Switzerland.

She dropped in to visit the Germany team at their base in Gdansk last week and posted pictures on her website of herself sharing a meal with the team.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

Is Shakib Al Hasan rightly given a break?

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Maasranga TV

Euro 2012

Ukraine v France

Live from 10:00pm

Sweden v England

Live from 12:45am (Saturday)

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News



Bangladesh Premier League

Mohammedan v Soccer Club, Feni

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu

National Stadium

Rahmatganj v Arambagh

Time: 4:15pm



England captain Steven Gerrard (C) and defender John Terry (R) practice headers during a training session at the Suche Stawy Municipal Stadium in Krakow on Wednesday ahead of their Euro 2012 Group D encounter against Sweden tonight.

PHOTO: AFP

CLEAR MEN
ANTI-DANDRUFF SHAMPOO
COOL SPORT MENTHOL
PRO-NUTRIUM 10

Vaseline MEN
WHITENING face WASH
WITH EVERY 350ml

CLEAR MEN

GET

50gm

Vaseline MEN
WHITENING face WASH
Free