

UEFA charges Croatia

REUTERS, Warsaw

UEFA moved to act against racism at Euro 2012 when it charged Croatia's Football Federation on Saturday for racist chants by the national team's fans in the Group C match against Italy in Poznan on Thursday.

European soccer's governing body has already sanctioned the Russian FA for the displaying of "illicit banners" by their fans at the tournament, but the Croatians are the first to face disciplinary proceedings for racist chants and displaying racist symbols.

UEFA are still investigating reports of alleged racist chanting during Italy's match against Spain in Gdansk on June 10, and Russia's match with the Czech Republic in Wroclaw on June 8 - the opening day of the tournament.

The issue of racism dominated the build-up to the tournament, co-hosted by Poland and Ukraine and the biggest sporting event in eastern Europe since the end of communism.

"UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) for the setting-off and throwing of fireworks, and the improper conduct of supporters (racist chants, racist symbols) at the UEFA Euro 2012 Group C match against Italy in Poznan on Thursday," UEFA said in a statement on Saturday.

UEFA is also investigating reports that a banana was thrown on to the pitch during the match which ended in a 1-1 draw.

The Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) network, which works closely with UEFA and has two "international monitors" at each Euro 2012 game, tweeted on Friday that its observers reported "between 300 and 500 Croatian fans were involved in racially abusing Italy striker Mario Balotelli."

The UEFA Control and Disciplinary Body will deal with the case on Tuesday.

Czech defender Theodor Gebre Selassie, the first black player to be play for the Czech national team, told reporters he had "noticed" racist chants directed at him during his side's game with Russia.



England striker Danny Welbeck (L) scores the third goal past Swedish goalkeeper Andreas Isaksson during their Euro 2012 Group D match at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

England end Swedish jinx

AFP, Kiev

England remained on course for a place in the knockout rounds of Euro 2012 after coming from behind to send Sweden crashing out of the tournament with a 3-2 victory here Friday.

Manchester United striker Danny Welbeck scored a well-taken winner for England in the 78th minute after the introduction of substitute Theo Walcott swung a see-saw Group D battle back in his side's favour.

England had got off to a dream start when recalled striker Andy Carroll headed them into a 23rd-minute lead.

But an own goal from Glen Johnson on 49 minutes followed by a header from Olof Mellberg in the 59th minute threatened to set up a disastrous night for Roy Hodgson's side.

However, the substitution of James Milner for Walcott changed the game. The Arsenal winger lashed in a 64th-minute equaliser to make it 2-2 and then provided the run and pass which set up



SWEDEN 2 : 3 ENGLAND

JOHNSON 49-O.G.,
MELLBERG 59



CARROLL 23,
WALCOTT 54,
WELBECK 78

Welbeck's winner.

England's first ever competitive victory over the Swedes means they will qualify for the quarter-finals with only a point in their final group game against co-hosts Ukraine in Donetsk next Tuesday.

However, England manager Hodgson will want to see a marked improvement from his side if they are to secure the draw they need after a performance littered with errors and shaky defending.

England had started positively, Scott Parker forcing a fine save out of Andreas Isaksson after only seven minutes with a fine swerving effort from 20 yards that the Swedish keeper parried to safety.

Sweden meanwhile had to wait until 20 minutes before threatening the England goal, captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic letting fly with

a long range shot that was blocked comfortably by Joe Hart.

For a while it looked as if England's familiar failings of conceding possession too cheaply and poor delivery would be costly.

After successive crosses from Ashley Young and Milner failed to meet their targets, captain Steven Gerrard had clearly seen enough on 23 minutes.

Seizing possession in midfield the England skipper looked up to curl in a pinpoint long-range diagonal ball which the twisting Carroll met with a thunderous header that gave Isaksson no chance.

England ought to have done better again on 36 minutes when Ashley Cole played in Young with a first-time pass only for the Manchester United man to

miscontrol and lash a low shot wide.

Sweden were forced to look for openings on the break and threatened to score when Ibrahimovic dispossessed the careless Johnson and played in Kim Kallstrom whose shot flew over.

England's positive first half display came unstuck, however, within five minutes of the restart as a rejuvenated Sweden dominated play.

The equaliser came after an Ibrahimovic free-kick bounced back off the wall and was played back to an unmarked Mellberg being played inside by Johnson.

The bearded centre-half's shot beat Hart and Johnson was unable to scramble out of his own net. Mellberg claimed it, but the equaliser was ruled an own-goal

by Johnson.

England were rocking and it got worse for Hodgson's men on 59 minutes as Sweden went 2-1 up. Sebastian Larsson swung in a curling free-kick and shambolic defending in the England defence allowed Mellberg to nod home Sweden's second.

Milner, who had capped a poor evening by conceding the free-kick which led to Sweden's second, was then promptly hauled off for Walcott.

The Arsenal winger made an immediate impact and within minutes England were level, Walcott's shot from just outside the area catching Isaksson off-balance to make it 2-2.

Sweden continued to cause England problems on the break and Ibrahimovic forced Hart to dive at full-stretch to turn around a 76th-minute effort.

But two minutes later Walcott rescued England again, darting into the box with an electrifying burst to cross for Welbeck, who flicked in a deft finish with the

Germans aim to win

AFP, Gdansk

After two wins already at Euro 2012, a confident Germany are aiming to beat Denmark on Sunday in Lviv to finish top of Group B and set up a quarterfinal near their base here in Gdansk.

Having twice flown to the Ukraine for their respective wins against Portugal and Holland, Germany return to Lviv aiming to beat the Danes and book their place in the Gdansk quarterfinal on Friday against the Group A runner-up.

The Germans still need a point to qualify with the Group B runner-up facing a last eight clash in Warsaw on Thursday against the winner of Group A.

With three goals at Euro 2012, including two against Holland and the winning header against Portugal, Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez has finally converted his impressive club form to German colours.

"The good thing with Mario is that he needs almost zero chances and still scores," said Germany midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger, who described Gomez's goals as a "precious commodity" for the Germans.

Following their shock win over Holland and 3-2 defeat to Portugal, victory against Germany should put Denmark in the quarter-finals, but a draw would be enough if the Netherlands beat Portugal in the other group match in Kharkiv.

But Schweinsteiger and Germany have other ideas.

"We can approach the final game against Denmark with a lot of self-confidence - every victory gives you an extra push," said the 27-year-old.

"We definitely want to win that game against Denmark."

HEAD TO HEAD

Played: 25
Draws 3

GERMANY
14 WINS



DENMARK
8 WINS

"I think we've opened the door to the quarter-finals. It's now in our hands to make everything clear on Sunday," he said.

Germany will be without suspended right-back Jerome Boateng, who picked up his second yellow card against Holland, and Loew has hinted he may switch captain Philipp Lahm from the left or even play a three-man defence.

Midfielder Mesut Ozil missed training on Friday "as a precautionary measure", but is set to play after his man-of-the-match performance against Portugal in the opening game.

The 23-year-old Real Madrid attacking midfielder has been in stellar form at the European championship and also impressed in Wednesday's win over Holland.

Danish wing Dennis Rommedahl will miss the game against Germany while midfielder Niki Zimling is a doubt after the pair suffered muscle injuries in the 3-2 defeat to Portugal.

"We are left with the number of points we had hoped for after the first two matches," said Danish coach Morten Olsen, whose team came back from 2-0 down against Portugal only to fall foul of Silvestre Varela's late winner.

"The scenario of our dreams would be to have one more point.

"That could have been the case, but you don't always have it your way in football."

Danish striker Nicklas Bendtner - who scored both their goals against the Portuguese - said his team have to show plenty of belief against the Germans.

"It's nice to know that we still stand a chance in this tournament," he said.

"We will have to do everything we can to get a good result against Germany. We are still in it.

"If we win against Germany, we are through. If we draw, other things must go our

Last chance for Dutch

AFP, Kharkiv

The statistics do not make pleasant reading for the Netherlands, who must beat Portugal by two goals on Sunday and hope Germany overcome Denmark if they are to reach the Euro 2012 quarter-finals.

No team has ever reached the knockout phase at a Euro after losing their first two matches, and statistical website Infostrada Sports estimates that Bert van Marwijk's side stand only a 9.5 percent chance of going through.

The omens are similarly ominous. The last time the Oranje were eliminated at the group phase of the European Championship was in 1980, two years after they finished runners-up at the 1978 World Cup -- just as they did in 2010.

As if the weight of history was not enough of a burden, van Marwijk also appears to face problems with several of his most important players.

Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Rafael van der Vaart have both expressed anger at being left out of his starting line-up, while Arjen Robben reacted to his substitution in Wednesday's 2-1 loss to Germany by jumping over an advertising hoarding and stalking angrily back to the dug-out.

The top scorers in qualifying with 37 goals, it took Holland 45 shots to find the

net at the Euro but Robin van Persie's 73rd-minute effort against Germany was ultimately in vain.

The Dutch press have deplored van Marwijk's continued faith in van Persie

at the expense of Huntelaar, who could start in place of Ibrahim Afellay in Kharkiv on Sunday with Holland obliged to attack Portugal from the off.

"I drew a lot of conclu-

sions from our defeat against Germany," said van Marwijk, as quoted by Dutch newspaper Algemeen Dagblad.

"We defended carelessly and the service of both Ibrahim Afellay and Arjen Robben from the flanks was not good enough."

Van Marwijk has a fully fit squad to choose from, with all 23 players able to participate in a closed training session in Krakow on Friday evening.

Portugal are also at full-strength, as reserve defender Miguel Lopes returned to training in the Polish town of Opalenica on Friday after recovering from a cold.

Beaten 1-0 by Germany in their opening game, Portugal let a 2-0 lead slip against Denmark in Lviv on Wednesday before Silvestre Varela's thunderous 87th-minute half-volley rejuvenated their attempts to reach the quarter-finals.

The result means that Portugal will be guaranteed to reach the last eight if they win, unless Denmark beat Germany in the other game, which would invoke a three-way head-to-head comparison between those teams.

The only disappointment for Portugal coach Paulo Bento was yet another mystifyingly poor performance in front of goal from his captain, Cristiano Ronaldo, who spurned two one-on-one chances to put Portugal 3-1 up.



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo controls the ball during a training session in Opalenica on Friday ahead of their Euro 2012 Group B match against the Netherlands. PHOTO: AFP

'Italy need a goalscorer'

AFP, Paris

Italy will beat Ireland in their final Euro 2012 Group C match said two-time Champions League winning coach Carlo Ancelotti on Saturday but if they are to really be a contender they need to find a striker.

The 53-year-old Paris Saint-Germain coach, a two-time European Cup winner as a player, told L'Equipe Italy coach Cesare Prandelli to his mind had got the strategy all wrong in the second-half of the 1-1 draw with Croatia on Thursday.

"During the first-half Italy played well and were very solid," he said.

"But in the second-half they completely changed their philosophy of playing."

"They were more defensive in trying to maintain their lead. That was not a good idea in my opinion."

"For after that the problem for Italy was to score and they do not have a goalscorer at the moment."

"(Mario) Balotelli and (Antonio) Cassano are not scoring enough."

Van Bommel slates critics

AFP, Kharkiv

Dutch captain Mark van Bommel launched a broadside at the side's critics on Saturday saying that their criticism was not justified even after losing both their Group B matches at Euro 2012.

The 35-year-old veteran defensive midfielder - who was part of the side that reached the 2010 World Cup final - said the criticism of him was emblematic of the slamming the side have received after losing 1-0 to Denmark and 2-1 to Germany.

It leaves them needing to beat Portugal on Sunday by a two goal margin to have any chance of progressing to the last eight, though should Denmark draw with table-toppers Germany it would make their victory redundant.

"Before I was a hero, now I am nothing more than the son-in-law of (Bert) Van Marwijk," said van Bommel, referring to the fact he is married to the Dutch coach's daughter.

"I read the criticism, and I understand it. But I do not find it justified."

"These past four years, we were kings, and I didn't hear anything (criticism)."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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Channel 9

Zimbabwe v Bangladesh

First match of tri-series

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Portugal v Holland

Live from 12:45am (Monday)

Denmark v Germany

Delayed from 2:45am (Monday)

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MotoGP World Championship

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Bangladesh Premier League

Muktijoddha v SK Jamal

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu

National Stadium

Premier Hockey League

Abahani v Usha

Time: 3:15pm

Venue: Maulana Bhasani