



Sweden star Zlatan Ibrahimovic (L) opens the scoring with an acrobatic volley during their Euro 2012 Group D match at the Olympic Stadium in Kiev on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Knockout line-up

AFP, Warsaw

Match 1 - June 21 (at Warsaw): Czech Republic v Portugal

Match 2 - June 22 (at Gdansk, Poland): Germany v Greece

Match 3 - June 23 (at Donetsk, Ukraine): Spain v France

Match 4 - June 24 (at Kiev): England v Italy

Semifinals

June 27 (Donetsk): Winner Match 1 v winner Match 3

June 28 (Warsaw): Winner Match 2 v winner Match 4

Final

July 1 (Kiev)

Rosicky resumes training

AFP, Wroclaw

Czech Republic captain Tomas Rosicky resumed training on Wednesday giving some cause for optimism that he will be able to start Thursday's Euro 2012 quarterfinal against Portugal in Warsaw, the Czech football association said.

The 31-year-old playmaker - a member of the flair-filled Czech side that reached the Euro 2004 semi-finals - has been struggling with an inflamed Achilles tendon injury which kept him out of the final group match (a 1-0 win over Poland) and saw him return to Prague for treatment.

However, the Arsenal star was able to do some light training on Wednesday ahead of the squad's departure for Warsaw later where the semifinal takes place.

"Rosicky returned to the team after two-days of treatment in Prague and underwent light training," the association said.

"It's still true that we will decide whether he will play or not only before the game," national team spokesman Jaroslav Kolar said on the association website.

Rosicky suffered his latest setback during the first-half of the 2-1 win over Greece in their second group match, and while he was ably replaced by Daniel Kolar the skipper is pivotal to the side.

The Czech captain left Wroclaw for Prague on Sunday to undergo treatment on his Achilles tendon under the supervision of a renowned Czech physio-therapist.

We're on right track

AFP, Kiev

Sweden are set fair for the 2014 World Cup qualifiers, despite exiting Euro 2012 at the group stage, their inspirational captain Zlatan Ibrahimovic said.

The 30-year-old striker's belief is based on their impressive 2-0 win over France -- their first victory over the French since October 1969 -- in their final Group D match here Tuesday.

Ibrahimovic, who scored a stunning goal to put them 1-0 up, credits coach Erik Hamren with putting together a strategy that is enthusing the players and giving them great hope for the future.

"This is a good launching pad for the 2014 World Cup qualifiers," said Ibrahimovic, who took his total to six goals in major finals.

"I don't know if the French were afraid but they played the match as if they were.

"As for us we are going to try and retain this spirit. Maybe we weren't that lucky against England? Whatever... At the moment we are playing well.

"We opened the scoring in two of the three matches. We are showing a real desire in how we are playing. We have learnt a lot of things under the coach.

"The one thing lacking in our game with Ukraine (a 2-1 defeat after leading 1-0 through an Ibrahimovic goal) was perhaps determination."

Ibrahimovic had an outstanding tournament -- save failing to mark Andrei Shevchenko properly allowing the Ukrainian icon to score the second of his goals -- perhaps laying to rest the notion that he didn't translate his club form onto the inter-

national stage.

However, Ibrahimovic was keener to talk about the team than himself, something again which he has been accused of neglecting in the past.

"I feel really good," said the AC Milan star. "This man of the match award reflects not my performance but that of the entire team. We have a really good side, though, we can still improve both in terms of personnel and individually.

"Me, I just give a hand to my team-mates." Hamren, who took over in 2009 after a successful career in club football in Norway and Denmark, paid a handsome tribute to Ibrahimovic and said he had mixed feelings at the end of their stay in Ukraine.

"I am proud of my players but there is still a little pain," admitted the 54-year-old, who after the Ukraine game had accused some of the players of being cowards for their lack of desire.

"That really hurts this feeling of pain. After the match, there was a feeling of sadness. When you have a good result, you always ask yourself if you could have done something different in the previous games.

"I am happy with the manner in which the players comported themselves while we were here. If we behave as if we are winners, then we will finish by winning. But that takes time.

"Ibrahimovic was outstanding as captain of the squad. It is not age that counts but more your physical condition. There are of course limits but those can be countered by the player's attitude and motivation.

"France came into the game unbeaten in 23 matches, so obviously I am delighted."

Drogba seals Shenhua deal

AFP, Shanghai

Chelsea and Ivory Coast idol Didier Drogba Wednesday said he had signed a two-and-a-half-year deal with Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua, where he will join former team-mate Nicolas Anelka.

The announcement ends months of speculation about the big-money move, in which the striker will become China's best paid player with wages of 200,000 pounds (\$314,000) a week, according to local reports.

"Today I can inform you that I have signed with Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua FC for a two-and-a-half year deal (until the end of 2014)," Drogba said on his website. "I will fly out to join up with the squad in July."

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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'GLT a necessity'

AFP, Warsaw

FIFA boss Sepp Blatter said on Wednesday that the introduction of goal-line technology is a must after Ukraine appeared to equalise against England in their final Euro 2012 group match but the referee waved play on.

"After last night's match #GLT is no longer an alternative but a necessity," the president of football's world governing body Sepp Blatter wrote on the micro-blogging site Twitter.

Blatter has frequently stated his position in favour of technology to determine disputed decisions, setting him at odds with his counterpart at European football's governing body UEFA, Michel Platini.

Platini this week told reporters in Warsaw that the five officials currently being used in Euro 2012, including two on the goal-line, would prevent any repeat of controversial incidents.

He again said that technology was a slippery slope towards its use for every decision, including off-side and handball.

But the five officials at co-hosts Ukraine's final group D match with England in Kiev on Tuesday were under scrutiny after Marko Devic forced a save from Joe Hart in the 62nd minute and John Terry cleared off the line.

Television replays suggested that the ball had crossed the line for a goal but Hungarian referee Viktor Kassai waved play on.

"The result of the match turned on a gross error by the officials who didn't give the Ukrainian goal," Ukraine's Sport-Express newspaper said on its website on Wednesday.

"And it all happened with five officials, two of whom were in charge of seeing whether a ball crosses the line."

It had not been the case the previous evening when Italian striker Antonio Cassano benefited from a sharp-eyed fifth official who correctly called that his header had crossed the line in the 2-0 win against Ireland.

FIFA is currently trialling two prototypes of goal-line technology, one from British firm HawkEye, which uses a series of cameras in stadium roofs to track the trajectory of the ball and another from German firm GoalRef, which uses sensors.

'Ukraine shot was a goal'

AFP, Warsaw

UEFA's chief refereeing officer Pierluigi Collina on Wednesday said that a Ukraine effort ruled out against England in their final Euro 2012 Group D match for not crossing the line should have been given.

"The ball crossed the line. That was unfortunate," Collina told a news conference in the Polish capital Warsaw, the day after the match in Donetsk that England won 1-0.

Collina blamed human error for the call but said two similar decisions in the 24 matches so far played in the tournament had been correct, adding: "The third, unfortunately, was wrong."

Chiellini out of England tie

REUTERS, Krakow

Italy defender Giorgio Chiellini will miss the Euro 2012 quarterfinal against England in Kiev on Sunday after suffering a thigh injury.

"It is clear that he cannot play on Sunday but we will try to get him fit for the rest of the tournament hoping Italy go further," team doctor Enrico Castellacci said in a statement after bringing forward medical tests originally due on Wednesday.

Chiellini suffered the injury in Monday's 2-0 Group C win over Ireland and was replaced by fellow centre back Leonardo Bonucci, who is now likely to keep his place alongside Andrea Barzagli against the English.

Toughnut Chiellini has been Italy's most consistent defender in the past four years but made a mistake for Mario Mandzukic's equaliser in the 1-1 draw with Croatia in the group stage.

Sheva calls it quits

REUTERS, Donetsk

Ukraine striker Andriy Shevchenko announced he will retire from international football after his country's elimination from Euro 2012 with a 1-0 defeat by England on Tuesday.

Shevchenko told reporters he intends to say his farewell in a friendly game before standing down from national team duty.

The 35-year-old, who is his country's youngest and oldest goalscorer and record marksman with 48 goals in 111 appearances, was on the bench v England due to a knee injury.

Former AC Milan and Chelsea forward Shevchenko began the tournament in grand style with both goals in the co-host's 2-1 comeback victory over Sweden.

Shevchenko's current deal with Dynamo Kiev is due to expire in July and he has expressed interest in a move to North America's Major League Soccer.

Ukraine coach Oleg Blokhin said after the England defeat he was looking to younger players ahead of the qualifying campaign for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil which starts in September.



Channel 9

Zimbabwe v Bangladesh

Tri-Series Match

Live from 5:00pm

Maasranga TV

Euro 2012

Czech Rep v Portugal

First Quarterfinal

Live from 12:45am (Friday)

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Sports News



PHOTO: AFP

Czech midfielders Tomas Rosicky (L) and Petr Jiracek jog during a training session in Wroclaw yesterday on the eve of their Euro 2012 quarterfinal against Portugal.