



PHOTO: AFP

England captain Wayne Rooney (C) fires home his second goal during their 2014 World Cup qualifier against San Marino at Wembley on Friday.

Japan stun France

Football

AFP, Paris

France will go into next week's crucial World Cup qualifier against Spain on the back of a defeat after Shinji Kagawa's 88th-minute goal gave Japan a 1-0 win in Friday's friendly at Stade de France.

The hosts had largely controlled the game but they were caught cold with two minutes to play when Manchester United forward Kagawa volleyed home Yuto Nagatomo's cross following a rapid counter-attack.

It was Japan's first win over France in six attempts and a first defeat for Didier Deschamps in his fourth game since taking over from Laurent Blanc at the France helm.

The former Marseille coach will hope the damage is not too profound ahead of Tuesday's pivotal Group I game with Spain in Madrid, while Japan will head into their friendly against Brazil in Poland with a spring in their step.

Despite a patchy pitch at the French national stadium, the hosts settled quickly and won five corners in the first 10 minutes, one of which was headed narrowly wide by Laurent Koscielny.

Deschamps' desire to find a place in his starting XI for Arsenal striker Olivier Giroud obliged Karim Benzema to play on the left, but the Real Madrid man was nonetheless a constant threat in the first half.

After heading Giroud's feathered cross straight at Japan goalkeeper Eiji Kawashima in the seventh minute, he shot wide three times before forcing Kawashima into action again with a well-placed free-kick from 20 yards.

Hugo Lloris could not hold a low free-kick from Kengo Nakamura and the rebound was collected by Kagawa, but he could only drag the ball across the face of goal.

Japan were coming into the game more and more, with Kagawa repositioned in a central role, and Deschamps elected to introduce Franck Ribery from the bench.

Heavyweights cruise

AFP, Paris



Defending title-holders Spain and a cluster of former champions coasted to comfortable 2014 World Cup qualifying wins across Europe on Friday.

Spain overtook France at the top of Group I on goal difference on the back of their 4-0 rout of Belarus in Minsk, while, in Dublin, Germany inflicted a record 6-1 home defeat on an injury-ravaged Republic of Ireland.

England entertained at Wembley with a 5-0 demolition of San Marino, Italy saw off spirited Armenia and 2018 World Cup hosts Russia added zest to their hopes of making it to Brazil with a 1-0 win over a Cristiano Ronaldo-led Portugal in Moscow.

World and European champions Spain warmed up for their showdown with France on Tuesday in style as Pedro Rodriguez fired a hat-trick in their emphatic victory.

Ruthless Germany maintained their grip on Group C, giving Ireland a night to forget at Lansdowne Road.

Ireland were playing under the title 'Irish Free State' when Spain won 5-0 in Dublin 71 years ago, but Germany gave Giovanni Trapattoni's men a lesson that will earn its own unfortunate place in the

history books.

Despite missing a host of regulars Irish fans will be questioning the continued stewardship of Trapattoni, who insisted he could rebuild his side after the disappointment of their Euro 2012 misadventure where they lost all three games.

The damage was done in Dublin by doubles from Marco Reus and Toni Kroos, with Mesut Ozil and Miroslav Klose adding to Ireland's misery. Germany move on to a perfect nine points with Sweden three points back after a nervy 2-1 come-from-behind win in the Faroe Islands.

The Swedes had to dig deep to prevent a major upset in Torshavn against a team ranked a massive 131 rungs below them in FIFA's world rankings.

Rogvi Baldvinsson, who had a fleeting two-week spell with Bristol Rovers this year before cutting short his stay with the English League Two outfit, set Swedish nerves on edge in the 57th minute.

But Fulham winger Alex Kacaniklic levelled eight minutes later and Paris Saint Germain's Zlatan Ibrahimovic saved their blushes to bag victory with quarter of an hour to go.

At Wembley England were inspired by a double from Wayne Rooney, wearing the captain's

armband in place of suspended Steven Gerrard, against minnows San Marino.

Danny Welbeck also contributed a brace with Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain opening his international scoring account.

Walcott in hospital

REUTERS, London

England winger Theo Walcott was taken to hospital for a chest scan following a challenge described by manager Roy Hodgson as "reckless" in his team's 5-0 win over San Marino in World Cup Group H qualifying on Friday.

San Marino goalkeeper Aldo Simoncini charged into the Arsenal player in the fifth minute as Walcott tried to get on the end of a through ball.

He needed five minutes of treatment on the field before going off to be replaced by Tottenham Hotspur's Aaron Lennon.

"I think if I describe it as a reckless challenge I am being very kind," Hodgson told reporters. "It was a very fierce challenge."

Rooney moved into fifth in England's all-time scoring charts.

England top Group H on seven points, three clear of Montenegro and Poland, who they meet on Tuesday in Warsaw.

Victory came at a price however with Theo Walcott being taken to hospital with a chest injury after a rash challenge by San Marino goalkeeper Aldo Simoncini early in the first half.

Italy took outright possession of Group B after their win in Armenia with Bulgaria held to a 1-1 draw by Denmark.

Fabio Capello's Russia earned their first ever win over Portugal in the post-Soviet era courtesy of Alexander Kerzhakov's first half goal in Moscow.

Russia, who agonisingly missed out on the 2010 finals on away goals to Slovenia in the play-offs, took sole possession at the top of Group F, with Portugal now placed second, three points behind.

Holland top Group D on goal difference from Romania, 1-0 winners in Turkey, after their 3-0 defeat of Andorra.

Iceland moved to within one point of Group E leaders Switzerland, held 1-1 by Norway, courtesy of a 2-1 win over Albania, while there is a three-way traffic jam at the top of Group G with Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Slovakia all on seven points.

WC EUROPEAN ZONE RESULTS

- Serbia 0 **Belgium 3** (Benteke 34, De Bruyne 68, Mirallas 90+1)
- Macedonia 1 (Ibraimi 16) **Croatia 2** (Corluka 33, Rakitic 61)
- Wales 2** (Bale 81-pen, 89) Scotland 1 (Morrison 27)
- Czech Republic 3** (Cebse Selassie 34, Pekhart 52, Rezek 67) Malta 1 (Briffa 38)
- Armenia 1 (Mkhitarian 27) **Italy 3** (Pirlo 11-pen, De Rossi 64, Osvaldo 82)
- Bulgaria 1 (Rangelov 7) Denmark 1 (Bendtner 40)
- Faroe Islands 1 (Baldvinsson 57)
- Sweden 2** (Kacaniklic 65, Ibrahimovic 75)
- Kazakhstan 0 Austria 0
- Republic of Ireland 1 (Keogh 90+2)
- Germany 6** (Reus 32, 40, Ozil 55-pen, Klose 58, Kroos 61, 83)
- Turkey 0 **Romania 1** (Grozav 45+1)
- Netherlands 3** (van der Vaart 7, Huntelaar 15, Schaken 50) Andorra 0
- Estonia 0 **Hungary 1** (Hajnal 47)
- Albania 1 (Cani 29) **Iceland 2** (B. Bjarnason 18, Sigursson 81)
- Switzerland 1 (Gavranovic 79) Norway 1 (Hangland 81)
- Slovenia 2** (Matavz 38, 61) Cyprus 1 (Alonettis 83)
- Russia 1** (Kerzhakov 6) Portugal 0
- Luxembourg 0 **Israel 6** (Radi 4, Eden Ben Basat 12, Hemed 27, 73, 90+1, Melikson 60)
- Liechtenstein 0 **Lithuania 2** (Cesnauskis 51, 75)
- Slovakia 2** (Hamsik 5-pen, Sapara 9)
- Latvia 1 (Verpakovskis 84-pen)
- Greece 0 Bosnia-Herzegovina 0
- Moldova 0 Ukraine 0
- England 5** (Rooney 35-pen, 70, Welbeck 38, 72, Oxlade-Chamberlain 77)
- San Marino 0
- Finland 1 (Hamalainen 63) Georgia 1 (Kashia 56)

What to WATCH

- STAR Cricket**
- Chennai v Sydney Sixers
- Live from 5:30pm
- Lions v Mumbai Indians
- Live from 9:30pm
- ESPN**
- MotoGP World Championship
- Japanese GP
- Live from 8:00am
- STAR Sports**
- F1 World Championship
- Korean GP
- Live from 11:45am
- TEN Sports**
- Shanghai Masters

DAY'S EVENT

- GP Federation Cup**
- Rahmatganj v Jessore
- Time: 3:30pm
- Abahani v Brothers Union
- Time: 5:30pm
- Venue: Bangabandhu National

Johnson fires USA

AFP, Los Angeles



Eddie Johnson scored two goals, including the game-winner in the 90th minute, to lift the United States to a 2-1 victory over Antigua and Barbuda in CONCACAF World Cup semifinal qualifying Friday.

Positioned on the far post, Johnson took a pass from substitute Alan Gordon and headed the ball past goalkeeper Molvin James for the winner.

Mexico, already assured of a berth in next year's final round, kept their perfect record in intact as they scored all their goals in the second half to rout Guyana 5-0 in another qualifier for the 2014 Brazil football showdown.

With their victory, the Americans moved into a tie with Guatemala for first place in Group A with 10 points and control their own destiny entering their last semifinal round match Tuesday against Guatemala in Kansas City, Kansas.

The USA is guaranteed to advance with a win or a draw against Guatemala and could potentially advance with a loss.

The Americans appeared to be heading to a surprising draw with winless Antigua before Johnson's heroics at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

Johnson scored his first goal in the 20th minute, heading home another accurate cross, this time from Graham Zusi.

Antigua equalized just five minutes later with Peter Byers driving into the area on the right and then sending the ball to Dexter Blackstock, who was inside the six-meter box for an easy finish.

The Americans created few chances after halftime and Antigua nearly went in front in the final 10 minutes as Byers curled a drive just wide of the right post.

Antigua goalkeeper James then produced a good save on Michael Bradley's header to keep the match even.

Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, Andres Guardado and Oribe Peralta got Mexico rolling with late goals en route to a blanking of Guyana in a neutral-site match at Houston, Texas.

Guyana defender Charles Pollard knocked in an own-goal in the 83rd minute and El Tri's Hernandez headed one in less than two minutes later.

Angel Reyna capped the scoring with a 25-yard blast for Mexico, who are a perfect 5-0 in group play with one game remaining.

Panama and El Salvador both missed out on opportunities to book early berths in the final qualifying round in CONCACAF

RESULTS

- Antigua-Barbuda 1 (Blackstone 25)
- United States 2** (Johnson 20, 90)
- Guatemala 2** (Figueroa 16, Ruiz 85)
- Jamaica 1 (Shelton 61)
- Guyana 0 (Pollard 82 OG) **Mexico 5** (Guardado 78, Peralta 80, Chicharito 85, Reyna 86)
- El Salvador 0 **Costa Rica 1** (Cubero 31)
- Canada 3** (Ricketts 14, Johnson 73, Edgar 79) Cuba 0



Spain forward Pedro Rodriguez (R) vies with Belarus defender Igor Shitov during their 2014 World Cup qualifying match at the Dinamo Stadium in Minsk on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Now we're delivering'

AFP, Montevideo



Lionel Messi transferred his club form for Spanish giants Barcelona to World Cup qualifying action for Argentina, with a brilliant brace of goals helping his country to a 3-0 win over Uruguay.

The win left the 1978 and 1986 world champions on top of the nine-nation South American group with 17 points from eight matches, one ahead of Colombia and Ecuador who both also won on Friday. Uruguay remain in the fourth and final automatic qualifying place.

Messi immediately turned his thoughts to Tuesday's away qualifying match against Chile.

"We were superior throughout and deserved the three points," said Messi. "They only wanted to defend, but luckily we won convincingly."

"When we opened the score, spaces started opening up and it became easier."

"We took a very important step and now we have to go to Chile, which will be tough, like all away matches in this tournament."

"But we go feeling confident because the squad is strong." Messi said it was good to see the public getting behind the team.

"Now that we're delivering results, people are happy with this team. Our squad is becoming increasingly strong. I feel an immense joy among our fans and it makes us feel proud. I'm always happy to be in the team. Of course, when the result goes our way, we can work more calmly. What's good is that we continue to improve."