



CONTRASTING EMOTIONS: (From L) Sweden's Jonas Olsson, Johan Elmander and Andreas Granqvist celebrate their last minute equalizer to seal a stunning comeback from 0-4 goals down while Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger and Holger Badstuber show their dejection during the 2014 World Cup qualifier at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin on Tuesday.

60 m heaven, 30 m hell

AFP, Berlin

German newspapers bemoaned and queried Wednesday how the national football side let slip a 4-0 lead to draw a World Cup qualifier against Sweden.

The visiting Swedes rebounded from being 4-0 down in Berlin's Olympic stadium to score four second half goals with the equaliser coming three minutes into injury time.

"Jogi, was that daft!" headlined the mass circulation Bild newspaper on its front page, referring to Germany coach Joachim Loew.

It pointed out that a German national team had never before frittered away being 4-0 up against a rival team.

Decrying it as a "stupid record", Bild said: "So beautiful, so brutal, so daft football can be!"

"60 Minutes Heaven, 30 Minutes Hell," the online edition of Der Spiegel said, commenting that Germany had had a "terrific victory in sight", but that after Sweden's four quick-fire goals: "All debate on the deficiencies of the German 11 will now start again."

"Sensationally given away," said the Tagesspiegel over a photo of the ball hitting the back of the German net as dismayed German players looked on in what the paper termed "incredulous amazement".

While the evening started out positively, it ended in "disappointment" and even a "big mystery", according to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, which said Germany played 60 minutes of such "goal-oriented" football it looked "seemingly safe" in its 4-0 lead.

The Berliner Zeitung also pointed out it was a "historic show" for the German side.

"In the end, a grotesque 4-4 draw in the fourth World Cup qualifier against the utterly overstretched Scandinavians left behind many questions," the paper said.

USA, Jamaica advance

REUTERS, Undated

The United States booked their place in the final qualifying round for the 2014 World Cup finals with a convincing 3-1 win over Guatemala in Kansas City on Tuesday.

The US finished top of Group A with 13 points with Jamaica, who beat Antigua and Barbuda 4-1, also going through to the final six of CONCACAF qualifying while Guatemala missed out on goal difference.

Juergen Klinsmann's team suffered an early scare when Carlos Ruiz broke away to put Guatemala 1-0 up in the fifth minute.

U.S. defender Carlos Bocanegra levelled the score five minutes later and then two goals from Clint Dempsey put the game decisively in the hands of the home side.

REUTERS, London



Germany squandered a four-goal lead to draw 4-4 with Sweden while world champions Spain conceded in stoppage time to draw 1-1 with France as both teams lost 100 per cent records in World Cup qualifying on Tuesday.

Northern Ireland came within 11 minutes of ruining Cristiano Ronaldo's 100th appearance for Portugal before Helder Postiga equalised to earn a 1-1 draw in Porto, but the Portuguese lost ground on leaders Russia in Group F.

The Russians beat Azerbaijan 1-0 in Moscow to maintain their perfect start under Italian coach Fabio Capello.

The Netherlands also won a fourth successive game, beating Romania 4-1 in Bucharest to end their opponents' three-match winning run.

However, Poland's Group H match with England at Warsaw's National Stadium was called off after the stadium roof was left open despite a down-pour which left the pitch waterlogged.

The game will now go ahead on Wednesday at 1500GMT.

In other notable matches, Bosnia stayed on course for what would be their first international tournament as an independent nation by beating Lithuania 3-0 at home and staying top of Group G along with Greece who beat Slovakia 1-0 in Bratislava.

Belgium and Croatia also moved ahead of the pack in Group A with both teams beating British opposition at home.

Belgium, whose emerging young team have already been tipped by pundits as having the talent to reach

Football is a simple game

where 22 men kick a ball about for 90 minutes and at the end, the Germans lose a 4 goal lead -Ex-England star Gary

Lineker provides a spin on his famous 'Germans always win' quote from Italia 90, on twitter

[Zlatan] Ibrahimovic put in a really good talk in the half-time break and he showed his class to me, he coached the other players as a good captain

-Sweden coach Erik Hamren explains his side's amazing comeback

"You know, everything is possible in football, even that I score a goal,"

- Per Mertesacker tries to make peace with giving up a 4

the later stages at the tournament in Brazil in 2014, beat Scotland 2-0 in Brussels to all but end the Scots hopes of reaching the finals.

Croatia stayed level on points with Belgium at the top of the standings with a 2-0 win over Wales in Osijek.

The most dramatic game on a night when most teams were playing their fourth qualifier, came in Berlin where Germany, 3-0 up at halftime, were coasting in their Group C match against the Swedes.

After powering into a 4-0 lead with a

Miroslav Klose double and goals by Per Mertesacker and Mesut Ozil, Germany seemed certain of making it four wins from four to move six points clear of the pack before they collapsed.

Sweden struck back with two quick goals midway through the second half from Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Mikael Lustig before Johan Elmander made it 4-3 after 76 minutes.

The Swedes then went all out for an equaliser and it arrived in the fourth minute of stoppage time when Rasmus Elm scored.

The only consolation for Klose was that he took his international tally to 67 goals, one behind Gerd Mueller's long-established record for his country.

Spain also conceded a late goal just as they looked to have done enough to seal a 25th straight victory in European and World Cup qualifiers.

Sergio Ramos put Spain ahead after 25 minutes and they would have doubled their lead if Cesc Fabregas's penalty had not been saved by Hugo Lloris.

France, though, stayed level on points with Spain at the top of the Group I standings after Olivier Giroud, who had only been on for six minutes, headed a last-gasp equaliser.

Unlike Spain, the Netherlands did make it four wins out of four and ended Romania's perfect start after three goals in the first half set up a 4-1 win to give them control of Group D.

Jeremain Lens put the Dutch ahead after eight minutes with Bruno Martens scoring in the 28th and Rafael van der Vaart netting a penalty to make it 3-1 just before the break.

Ciprian Marica had scored for Romania after 39 minutes but Robin van Persie wrapped the game up five minutes from time.

EUROPEAN ZONE RESULTS

Belgium 2 (Benteke 69, Kompany 71) **Scotland 0**
Croatia 2 (Mandzukic 27, Eduardo 58) **Wales 0**
Macedonia 1 (Ibraimi 59-pen) **Serbia 0**
Czech Republic 0 **Bulgaria 0**
Italy 3 (Montolivo 33, De Rossi 37, Balotelli 54) **Denmark 1** (Kvist 46)
Germany 4 (Klose 8, 15, Mertesacker 39, Ozil 56) **Sweden 4** (Ibrahimovic 62, Lustig 64, Elmander 76, Elm 90+3)
Faroes 1 (Hansen 68) **Ireland 4** (Wilson 47, Walters 52, Justinussen 73-o.g., O'Dea 89)
Austria 4 (Janko 24, 63, Alaba 71, Harnik 90+3) **Kazakhstan 0**
Andorra 0 **Estonia 1** (Oper 56)
Romania 1 (Marica 40) **Netherlands 4** (Lens 9, Martins Indi 29, van der Vaart 45+2-pen, van Persie 86)
Hungary 3 (Koman 31, Szalai 50, Gera 57-pen) **Turkey 1** (Erlding 22)
Cyprus 1 (Aloneftis 42) **Norway 3** (Hangeland 44, Elyounoussi 81-pen, King 83)
Iceland 0 **Switzerland 2** (Barnetta 66, Gavranovic 79)
Albania 1 (Rroshti 36) **Slovenia 0**
Russia 1 (Shirokov 84-pen) **Azerbaijan 0**
Portugal 1 (Postiga 79) **Northern Ireland 1** (McGinn 30)
Israel 3 (Hemed 13, 48, Eden Ben Basat 35) **Luxembourg 0**
Slovakia 0 **Greece 1** (Salpingidis 63)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 3 (Ibisevic 29, Dzeko 35, Pjanic 41) **Lithuania 0**
Ukraine 0 **Montenegro 1** (Damjanovic 45)
San Marino 0 **Moldova 2** (Dadu 72-pen, Epureanu 78)
Spain 1 (Ramos 25) **France 1**

Erik Hamren bemused by comeback

REUTERS, Berlin



Sweden coach Erik Hamren was left bemused after his team staged an extraordinary recovery to come back from 4-0 down and earn a 4-4 draw with Germany in World Cup Group C qualifying on Tuesday.

"I've never heard of anything like this in an international game," Hamren told a news conference after Sweden struck with four goals in the last 31 minutes at the Olympic Stadium.

"I can't explain it," he added with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders. "But I think I'm going to sleep well tonight."

Germany dominated the first hour and were in complete control thanks to two goals by Miroslav Klose and one apiece from Per Mertesacker and Mesut Ozil.

"No, I didn't want to go home when we went 3-0 down at halftime," said Hamren. "I wanted to see if we could show strength and pride."

"If you're a loser you want to go home but if you're a winner you stay and fight," he added after second-placed Sweden took their points haul to seven from three games thanks to goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Mikael Lustig, Johan Elmander and Rasmus Elm.

Germany coach Joachim Loew was also perplexed after the group leaders dropped their first point in the fourth game of the campaign.

"It was an extraordinary match," he said. "Any time you lead 4-0 and end up with a 4-4 draw the disappointment will outweigh everything else."

"Sweden were invisible for the first 60 minutes. We have to learn our lessons from this."

The German fans jeered their team after the match but Loew said his squad would bounce back.

"I don't think it'll do any lasting damage to my players," he explained.

"Their feet didn't leave the ground when we played so excellently to win 6-1 in Ireland on Friday and they won't be hanging their heads in despair after this 4-4 draw."

Spain bemoans flop Christmas comes early

AFP, Madrid



Spain's press Wednesday bemoaned a "major flop" in their 1-1 World Cup qualifier draw against France, criticising serious weaknesses in midfield and defence that led to France's last-gasp equalizer.

"Major flop," headlined the top selling sports paper Marca. "Collapse," said Barcelona-based daily Mundo Deportivo. "Spain were not Spain," was the verdict of leading newspaper El Pais.

The big sports titles did not mince their words in describing La Roja's performance in the World Cup qualifier after Spain started well only to be outplayed by France in the second half.

The draw, played in Atletico Madrid's Vicente Calderon stadium, brought to an end Spain's run of 24 consecutive wins in qualifying matches that stretches back to 2007.

It leaves the two sides level at the top of the group on seven points, three ahead of Georgia.

"The worst version of Spain in a long time leads to serious consequences," said Marca, adding that the draw means Spain will have it all to do when the two sides meet again in Paris in March.

Rival Madrid-based sports daily AS was equally unforgiving. "Throughout the second half, Spain, disorganized and almost in panic, were at the mercy of France."

Spanish papers slammed Sergio Busquets' absence in the midfield and an average performance in defence, and in particular Juanfran Torres who lost the ball in midfield to allow France to score in the dying minutes.

"Without the Busquets-Xabi Alonso duo in midfield, La Roja is not the same," said Marca.

"After a good start, Spain gambled with the result," added El Pais.

Alfredo Relano, the director of AS, criticised Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque's decision to bring on former Atletico Madrid player Fernando Torres towards the end of the match.

"Del Bosque played politics by bringing in Torres at his old stadium when he should have tightened the game with Javi Martinez," he said.

But the criticisms were also mixed with praise for France's mindset in the second half.

"After the break, France played decisively and were woken out of their slumber," El Pais said.

AS took the most optimistic view of the result: "Mission: win in Paris," the paper headlined.

Real count cost

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid's medical staff will be busy ahead of the return to La Liga action this weekend after a string of players returned from international duty with knocks and injuries.

Brazil left back Marcelo has fractured a bone in his right foot and is expected to be out of action for up to three months, while Fabio Coentrao, Alvaro Arbeloa, Karim Benzema, Gonzalo Higuain and Sami Khedira are all in need of treatment.

Left back Coentrao dropped out of the Portugal squad with a muscle complaint, and with the versatile Arbeloa also being substituted out of Spain's 1-1 home draw against France with a muscle problem, Jose Mourinho may have gaps to fill at full back in upcoming games.

Khedira missed Germany's 4-4 draw at home to Sweden after picking up a muscle injury against Ireland.

AFP, Milan



Cesare Prandelli's wish for a relaxing festive season took shape at the San Siro on Tuesday as Italy overcame being reduced to 10 men to beat Denmark 3-1 in a 2014 World Cup qualifier.

Azzurri coach Prandelli has tinkered with teams and formations since Italy began their qualifying campaign with a lucky 2-2 draw away to Bulgaria last month.

But after four of their 10 matches the four-time World Cup winners have 10 points from a possible 12 at the top of Group B with second-placed Bulgaria four points adrift.

Prandelli has come under scrutiny since September's draw in Sofia and a poor performance in a 2-0 win over Malta four days later.

But the former Fiorentina handler looked relaxed as he considered a worry-free lead-up to Christmas before qualifying for Brazil 2014 resumes with a trip to Malta in March 2013.

"Our next match is in March, that's why these three points are so important," said Prandelli.

"In the standings, we're in

a good position but it's early days yet. We wanted to celebrate Christmas in advance this year."

Italy had to do without influential 'keeper and captain Gianluigi Buffon after the Juventus star failed a late fitness test having picked up a thigh niggle in Friday's 3-1 win over Armenia.

Napoli keeper Morgan De Sanctis stepped in, and Italy also welcomed the return of Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli who had missed their three previous qualifiers.

Despite a shaky start against the Danes, who came to Italy with only two draws to their name, Italy rode their luck to open the scoring through AC Milan midfielder Riccardo Montolivo.

Despite having Balotelli to his right, the AC Milan midfielder's rightful decision to strike from the edge of the area saw Danish 'keeper Stephan Andersen well beaten in the 33rd minute.

Three minutes later Andersen was beaten again when De Rossi's glancing header from Pirlo's superb curling cross doubled Italy's lead.

Denmark reduced the

arrears in first half injury time after Lars Jacobsen's cross from the right deflected off the head of Italy defender Federico Balzaretti.

It dropped fortuitously in the path of Stuttgart midfielder William Kvist, who beat De Sanctis low to his right with a powerful volley from the edge of the area.

Italy were given another fright only a minute after the restart when Balotelli's strike partner Pablo Osvaldo was sent off for using his hand to fend off the attention of defender Nicolai Stokholm.

If the 37,000 crowd at the San Siro thought Italy would crumble, their fears were allayed in spectacular fashion when Balotelli beat an advancing Andersen to Andrea Pirlo's long midfield ball to poke the ball into the net on 54 minutes.

Denmark coach Morten Olsen, whose side have yet to win in three games, said Italy's loss of Osvaldo had changed little.

"We know that Italy are famous for their ten-man defence, it didn't change much for us having a man advantage," said Olsen.

Despite holding only two

points from three games, he added: "I believe we played well. I didn't believe we'd bring back three points from Italy."

"The points we lost, we lost them (in a draw) against the Czech Republic."

Prandelli, meanwhile, hinted that his side could finally be getting close to the level they possessed on their way to an unlikely final place at the Euro earlier this year.

"I'm happy because we showed a lot of commitment out there, and I liked that," added the Italian.

"We still have a lot to improve on and things have been complicated in the last few days but the boys have been very professional and their commitment tonight pleased me a lot."



STAR Cricket
Champions League T20
Highveld Lions v Sydney Sixers
Live from 5:30pm
Mumbai Indians v Yorkshire
Live from 9:30pm

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