

# Mueller on the double

AFP, Dortmund



World champions Germany got their Euro 2016 qualifying campaign off to a shaky start with a nervy 2-1 win over Scotland in Dortmund on Sunday.

Germany lost 4-2 against Argentina in a friendly on Wednesday but a goal in each half from Bayern Munich attacker Thomas Mueller ensured they won their first competitive fixture since the World Cup.

Scotland delivered a spirited performance though and they were rewarded for a positive second-half approach when winger Ikechi Anya raced clear to equalise on 66 minutes.

But the visitors failed to clear a corner four minutes later and Mueller capitalised to thump home his 24th international goal.

Mueller's winner denied Gordon Strachan's side what would have been a precious point in a group that also includes the Republic of Ireland, Poland, Georgia and Gibraltar.

In midfield, Germany were missing new captain Bastian Schweinsteiger, Real Madrid's Sami Khedira and Arsenal's Mesut Ozil, while at the back Jerome Boateng returned in defence.

With Philipp Lahm having retired after the World Cup, Hoffenheim's Sebastian Rudy surprisingly earned his third cap at right-back.

Scotland were captained by Manchester United midfielder Darren Fletcher and the visitors also included in-form Everton striker Steven Naismith as they sought to beat Germany in a competitive fixture for the first time.

There looked little danger of that in the opening stages. On eight minutes a Toni Kroos cross found Mueller unmarked but the 25-year-old badly miscued his header from eight yards out.

The Scots then created a decent opening when Ikechi Anya turned Boateng and Barry Bannan saw his shot deflected wide and Celtic's Charlie Mulgrew soon cracked a volley against the woodwork - albeit from an offside position.

German left-back Erik Durm tested Scotland keeper David Marshall from distance and eighteen minutes in, the home team made the breakthrough.

Rudy lofted a ball into the box and it was third time lucky for Mueller in the air as he climbed above Russell Martin to cleverly steer a header over Marshall.

Reus then forced another save from Marshall as Germany dominated possession in a busy opening period for the Cardiff City keeper.

Only 1-0 down the break and playing into the vocal visiting fans end in the second half, Scotland still had plenty of hope.

And there was a real warning for Germany three minutes after the restart when Naismith skipped past two players inside the box only to see his shot shave the post.



Germany forward Thomas Mueller (L) celebrates his second goal with teammates during their Euro 2016 qualifier against Scotland in Dortmund on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Albania stun Portugal

REUTERS, Lisbon



Albania handed demoralised Portugal one of their most embarrassing international defeats when a spectacular volley by Bekim Balaj gave the rank outsiders a 1-0 away win in their opening Euro 2016 qualifier on Sunday.

The defeat, Portugal's first at home in a competitive international since they lost to Denmark six years ago, was the last thing Portugal coach Paulo Bento needed after clinging to his job despite his side's dismal World Cup display, when they went out in the group stage.

Portugal, missing Cristiano

Ronaldo over fitness concerns for the Group I match, were again lacklustre in attack, suggesting they lack any sort of alternative to the Real Madrid forward.

Albania, who have never qualified for a major tournament, defended with five across the back line and another four in front of that. It was certainly not sophisticated but it was too much for Portugal's unimaginative midfield and attack to break down.

Albania scored from their only shot on target in the 52nd minute when Odise Roshi crossed from the near the corner flag into the centre of the penalty area.

Balaj, running away from the goal, met it with a first-time shot on the turn, the 23-year-old Slavia

Prague forward hooking it brilliantly past a bemused Rui Patricio from near the penalty spot.

Albania retreated even further after the goal and the rest of the game was played almost entirely in their half of the field.

Portugal began to look more dangerous and Nani was just wide with a 25-metre effort, then Ricardo Horta rattled the crossbar with another effort from just outside the area.

Albania goalkeeper Etrit Berisha also played his part as he saved a dangerous effort from Fabio Coentrao and tipped Andre Gomes' shot over the bar in the dying minutes.

The last few minutes were played to a deafening chorus of jeers from the 23,000 crowd at Aveiro's Municipal stadium who also waved

white handkerchiefs.

"These are natural reactions," Bento told RTP television. "We know the public was not satisfied. We have to respect people's reactions and carry on our way."

"It didn't go well for us in terms of the result," added the beleaguered coach.

"In the first half, we had chances to take lead and we had the game completely under control...in the second half, we started well but conceded a goal from the only chance that our opponents created."

"There are no easy games, whether it's Albania or any other team" added midfielder Joao Moutinho.

"We have to do better, there can't be any more excuses."

# Shakib opens, scores 44

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan scored a 34-ball 44 for Bangladesh Under-19 on the second day of the two-day practice match against Bangladesh A at the Sher-Bangla National Cricket Stadium at Mirpur yesterday.

The left-hander, who is participating in a practice match for the first time since he was suspended in July, also took a wicket for 14 runs.

Meanwhile, Liton Kumar scored a century for Bangladesh A. The top-order batsman hammered 14 fours and two sixes in his 149-ball 103. Marshall Ayub, who batted at three, scored 62 while wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan remained unbeaten on 67. Captain Naeem Islam was also unbeaten on 39. Bangladesh A finished on 332 for 4 in 90 overs.

# Sepp to seek fifth term

REUTERS, Manchester

Sepp Blatter will stand for re-election as FIFA president next year, he confirmed on Monday.

The 78-year-old Swiss, who was first elected in 1998, confirmed his candidature for a fifth term as president in a recorded interview transmitted to delegates at the Soccerex Global Convention.

"You see a mission is never finished. And my mission is not finished," he said.

"Then I got (from) the last (FIFA) congress in Sao Paulo not only the impression but the support of the majority, a huge majority of national associations asking 'Please go on, be our president also in future.'"

"Now I would make an official declaration definitely in September (to stand)... when we have the executive committee."

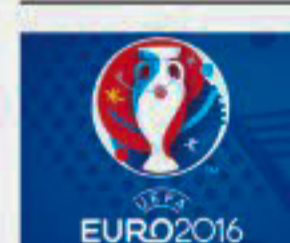


Poland striker Robert Lewandowski celebrates one of his four goals against Gibraltar during their Euro 2016 qualifier in Faro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

# 4-shooter Lewandowski

REUTERS, Faro



Robert Lewandowski hit four goals in the second half as Poland swept aside Gibraltar in their first ever competitive game 7-0 in Euro 2016 qualifying Group D on Sunday.

There was to be no fairytale for the newcomers in a tough group also including world champions Germany, Ireland, Scotland and Georgia.

Kamil Grosicki, who opened the scoring on 11 minutes, coolly took his second at the start of the second half and the floodgates opened.

Lewandowski, Poland's captain, quickly hit two and Lukasz Szukala headed in the fifth.

In the final stages the unforgiving Bayern Munich striker slotted in two more.

Gibraltar's rocky enclave has a population of just under 30,000 and their Victoria Stadium fails to meet UEFA standards.

The game was therefore played at

the Algarve stadium in Portugal, where the Gibraltar fans that made the trip were in full voice for their national anthem and did their best to rally the players.

There was a positive mood from the Gibraltar camp ahead of the game, encouraged by their first victory over Malta in June and they did not ever give up.

The small British overseas territory that borders the southern part of Spain only became a UEFA member in May 2013, and played a first friendly match against Slovakia the following November, which they drew 0-0.

Spain were against Gibraltar's membership due to a dispute over sovereignty and Gibraltar were kept away from the reigning European champions in the group stages for political reasons.

Playing in a largely empty stadium on Sunday, they came under immediate pressure from Poland, and goalkeeper Jordan Perez was kept busy, notably by a Kamil Glik header from a corner.

The Poles soon took the lead through Grosicki, whose shot took a slight deflection off David Artell.

Poland continued to have the greater possession and carried a height advantage at set-plays but midway through the first half Gibraltar caused concern at the other end with a run from Brian Perez, who screwed his shot wide of the post from 20 yards.

After the break Poland turned their dominance into goals as Grosicki came inside Joseph Chipolina and Artell before coolly finishing.

Then Lewandowski struck twice in three minutes as he stooped to head in a Jakub Wawrzyniak cross and then slotted clinically into the corner.

Next Szukala powered a header into the net from Mateusz Klich's inswinging free-kick.

The predatory Lewandowski did not let a Gibraltar side, now in disarray at the back, off the hook. He sprinted clear of Chipolina for his hat-trick and was on target again in injury time to complete the rout.

# Dutch seek restart

AFP, Prague



The Netherlands under new manager Guus Hiddink get their Euro 2016 qualifying bid underway against the Czech Republic in Prague on Tuesday.

The Dutch swapped coach Louis van Gaal for Hiddink as the former moved to Manchester United following Holland's 3-0 third-place play-off win over Brazil.

But their new era got off to a lacklustre start with a 2-0 friendly loss to Italy in Bari last Thursday after conceding both goals in the opening ten minutes of the game.

"We won't panic, we have to remain concentrated, there are negatives from this match, but also positives," the 67-year-old Hiddink said after the game in which the Dutch resumed the 4-3-3 system after playing a 5-3-2 under van Gaal.

In Prague, Hiddink will miss his top star Arjen Robben, out with an ankle injury, as well as Ron Vlaar, Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, Jordy Clasie and Rafael van der Vaart.

Vying for a spot in the first-ever 24-team European Championship in France, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic face Turkey, Latvia, Iceland and Kazakhstan in the group stage.

Tuesday's tie will be the first-ever national team qualifier for Czech coach Pavel Vrba, who took the side over in January after it had failed to qualify to Brazil.

But the man who led Czech top flight side Viktoria Pilsen to two Czech titles and as many appearances in the Champions League has so far failed to impress as national team coach.

Under Vrba, the Czechs have mustered two draws in friendlies and two home losses -- to Austria in June and to the United States last week.

After the 1-0 loss to the Americans, Vrba bemoaned his team's poor performance up front, where Matej Vydra from Championship side Watford misses the injured fellow striker Libor Kozak from Aston Villa.

"We have created more chances than the opponent but wasted too many chances today, that's really rare," Vrba said.

"In some phases our game's nice to watch, but our weakness is that we don't convert and the opponents punish us."

On Saturday, the Czechs trained under the supervision of former national team coach Karel Bruckner, who led them to a spectacular 3-2 victory over the Netherlands at Euro 2004 on their way to the bronze medals.

In a qualifying campaign, the two teams last clashed ahead of the 2006 World Cup, with the Dutch earning 2-0 wins both home and away.

# Pirlo to play on for Italy

AFP, Rome

Italian playmaker Andrea Pirlo has said he intends to continue playing for the national side despite hinting after the World Cup that at 35 years old it was time for him to step aside.

"I have been talking with (new Italy coach Antonio) Conte who asked me if I was ready to play again for the Azzurri and I told him that I was," the Juventus star told Gazzetta TV.

"It was a difficult decision to take. I had wanted to stop playing for the national side but he (Conte) took over and he asked me to lend a hand."

"I am happy to do that and we are hopeful we can achieve great things together."

# BPL appeal hearing on

SPORTS REPORTER



The final hearing of the appeals against the decisions of Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) anti-corruption tribunal on match-fixing in the BPL began yesterday.

The tribunal's decisions -- which acquitted six out of the nine individuals charged for corruption by the ICC and imposed suspensions of varying lengths on cricketers Mohammad Ashraful and Kaushal Lokuarachchi and Dhaka Gladiators owner Shihab Chowdhury -- were challenged by four parties and as per the BCB's code, a separate hearing is taking place with the chairman of the panel. Representatives of Ashraful, the ICC and the BCB, Mahbubul Alam, Mosharraf Hossain, Shihab and Gladiators CEO Gaurav Rawat were present during yesterday's hearing.

If the parties are unhappy with the verdict of the chairman of the disciplinary panel they can lodge a last appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland.

# 'Coaches could challenge referees'

AFP, Manchester

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said Monday he wants to start trials on giving coaches the right to "challenge" referee decisions during a match.

The system, backed by television monitors, could be tried at the Under-20 World Cup in New Zealand next year and Blatter said he would like to find a national league to test the challenge.

Blatter first raised the idea at the FIFA congress in June but he told the Soccerex conference in Manchester he would now propose the move to the International Board, football's lawmaking body.