

## BIZARRE IBRA GOAL

A bizarre headed goal from Zlatan Ibrahimovic put Sweden on the road to a 2-0 victory over Moldova in their Euro 2016 Group G qualifier in Chisinau on Friday, with the striker also netting a late penalty. Sweden's captain gave his side the lead immediately after halftime when Moldova goalkeeper Ilie Cebanu's attempt to deal with a back pass failed to clear the frontman. Ibrahimovic reacted with lightning reflexes to head the ball into an empty net from the edge of the penalty area to notch his 52nd goal in 102 international appearances. - REUTERS



## Alba out for 10 days

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona confirmed that left-back Jordi Alba is only expected to be sidelined for 10 days after carrying out tests on a hamstring injury picked up in Spain's 1-0 win over Ukraine on Friday. "Tests performed by the FC Barcelona medical services on Saturday morning have revealed that Jordi Alba has a grade 1 injury to the adductor muscle in his right leg," the club said in a statement.

"This hamstring injury means he'll be out of action for approximately ten days."

The injury is a minor blow for Barcelona who are attempting to win the treble of La Liga, Copa del Rey and Champions League for only the second time in the club's history.

However, he should be fit to face Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal on April 15.

## Nat'l hockey's final round underway

SPORTS REPORTER

The final round of 30th ATN Bangla Gold Cup National Hockey Championship began at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. In the opening day's matches, Bangladesh Krira Shikha Protishthan blanked Rajshahi district 3-0, thanks to two goals from Ariful Islam and one from Mehedi Hasan. In the second match, Faridpur district edged past Bangladesh Air Force, courtesy of a single goal from national team's Rabbi Salehin. In the day's third match, Dhaka district outplayed Satkhira district 7-0, while Bangladesh Army defeated Bangladesh Police 3-0 in the day's final match.

## Football for transgenders

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A special football tournament for transgenders was held at the Adhar Chandra Model High School ground in Savar, on the outskirts of the capital yesterday afternoon.

Bangladesh Hijra Sporting Club, a club supported by a non-government organization People's Organization of Orb Land (POOL), organised the football tournament where local member of the parliament Enamur Rahman was present as the chief guest.

According to the organisers, this is the first ever football tournament for transgenders in the country and they hoped this effort would continue in future, which will help internalise these people into society and reduce the discrimination they face.



Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruij (L) and his Uzbekistan counterpart Bakhtiyor Ashurmatov explain their preparations for today's AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers fixture during their respective press-briefings at the Bangladesh Football Federation House yesterday.



PHOTOS: STAR

# Booters up against Shatskikh's successors

SPORTS REPORTER



Nine years ago, Uzbekistan national team came to Bangladesh for their second leg fixture of the Asian Cup Qualifiers. The Uzbek side, featuring legendary players like Maksim Shatskikh and Server Djeparov, had it all too easy against the hosts, winning 4-0 at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, for a 9-0 win on aggregate. Shatskikh, the Dynamo Kiev legend, and Djeparov, a two-time Asian footballer-of-the-year award winner, shared five goals between them as the Uzbeks cruised to the next round.

Nine years later, it is the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers which brings the Uzbeks to these shores. Although the under-22 teams will meet this time, there is enough quality in the Uzbekistan

ranks to cause a few headaches for the Bangladesh think-tank. Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruij, who urged everyone to keep their expectations to a realistic level prior to the start of the championship, believes that Uzbekistan will be no easier than Syria, who beat the hosts 4-0 in the opening match.

"We were nervous against Syria and made some silly mistakes. Uzbekistan are at the same level as Syria and the difference with us is vast," said the Dutchman at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "It would be a tough match against Uzbekistan. We have to think about the mistakes we made in the last match and must avoid them and have to be more compact in organisation."

The least of de Kruij's worries will be the 21-year-old striker Igor Sergeev, who is already being touted as the heir apparent to Shatskikh in his Uzbekistan. The lanky forward, who has already

scored five goals for the senior national team, showed a glimpse of his prowess in front of goal by scoring the first and setting up the second for his skipper Vladimir Kozak in the match against India.

Uzbekistan coach Bakhtiyor Ashurmatov thinks highly of this striker, who like Shatskikh, is of Russian descent and plays in the classical centre-forward's position.

"Sergeev is one of the best attacking players of Uzbekistan today, not only of the Olympic team but also of the national team. He should become a player like Maksim Shatskikh one day," opined Ashurmatov.

Apart from Sergeev, there are two other players in this Uzbekistan squad who have experience playing for the senior team. This team also came here seven days before the start of the championship to acclimatise with the conditions here. They played a game against Abahani

which ended in a goalless draw. But despite the time they took, the Uzbeks did not seem to fully cope with the heat and humidity here yet, if their performance against India is anything to go by. However, the match against Bangladesh will kick off at 6:00pm which would give them a comfortable atmosphere and may allow them to express themselves as well.

For the hosts, it will be a matter of defending as deep and as compact as possible to keep the Uzbeks at bay. After conceding two goals in the opening 14 minutes against Syria, de Kruij switched to a 54-1 system, and we might see that system employed from the beginning of today's match. The good news for de Kruij is his key attacking midfielder Hemanta Vincent Biswas will be back in the side after serving a one-match suspension, which he received two years ago while playing for Bangladesh

under-19 team. Hemanta might replace one of the two wide attackers from the starting eleven of the first match.

## INDIA TAKE ON HIGH-FLYING SYRIA

The Bangladesh versus Uzbekistan match will be preceded by the one between India and Syria. The Indians managed to keep Uzbekistan at bay till the 87th minute of the opening fixture on Friday. But the last three minutes of normal time and four minutes of added time saw the Indians concede two goals, thanks to a howler from their keeper and an error from one of their most reliable defenders. Despite the defeat, the Indians looked full of spirit and will be expected to pose some challenges to the Syrians, who dispatched Bangladesh 4-0 in their first match. That result put the Syrians on top of the table as they lead Uzbekistan on superior goal difference.

## Sanchez plots revenge

AFP, London

Chile forward Alexis Sanchez plans to make the most of home advantage at the Arsenal star plots revenge against Brazil in Sunday's friendly at the Emirates Stadium.

Sanchez is still smarting from Chile's World Cup exit at the hands of the hosts less than 12 months ago and he would love to make amends by leading his country to victory over their South American rivals at the home of his current club.

The 26-year-old, who moved to north London from Barcelona last year, scored Chile's equaliser in a dramatic last-16 clash in Belo Horizonte, but it was Brazil goalkeeper Julio Cesar who finished as the hero after saving two penalties, including one from Sanchez, to seal a 3-2 win in the shoot-out.

With that in mind, Sanchez has set his sights on handing Brazil, including his good friend and former Barca teammate Neymar, a first defeat in eight matches under new coach Dunga in front of a 60,000-capacity crowd at the Emirates.

"I'm so excited and honoured to be playing for the national team of Chile, against our great rivals Brazil, in front of the incredible Arsenal fans at Emirates Stadium," Sanchez said.

## Xavi joins Qatari side

AFP, Doha

Barcelona and Spain midfielder Xavi Hernandez has signed for Qatari side, Al Sadd for next season, it was confirmed by club officials on Saturday.

Pictures posted on social media by Al Sadd first team manager Abdullah Al-Berik said the 35-year-old 2010 World Cup winner had signed for one of Qatar's top league sides.

"Al Sadd have just managed to sign Barcelona captain Xavi and this is a picture of him with sporting director Muhammed Ghoulam," Berik wrote on Instagram.

## Baz excited...

FROM PAGE 1  
career after Sunday's final even though the spinner has taken 15 wickets in the tournament.

"He is a tremendous ambassador for the game," the captain said. "He's given over half his life to this game and has been both an outstanding teammate and a very close friend. It will be nice to achieve the ultimate success for him."

McCullum said he expected a keen battle against a country with whom New Zealand shared a "healthy rivalry."

"We have seen some epic battles over the years and across codes as well, not just cricket and rugby," he said.

"Tomorrow is no different. It's a healthy rivalry which can continue well after our time. It's one that we look forward to as well."

# Morata rescues Spain

REUTERS, Seville



Forward Alvaro Morata justified his selection for Spain by scoring his debut international goal in a laboured 1-0 home win for the holders against Ukraine in Euro 2016 qualifying Group C on Friday.

Morata galloped on to a Koke pass in the 28th minute at the Sanchez Pizjuan stadium in Seville and his shot took a slight deflection off a defender before looping over Ukraine goalkeeper Andriy Pyatov into the net.

The victory helped Spain maintain pressure on group leaders Slovakia, who won 3-0 at home to Luxembourg and have 15 points from five matches.

Spain, beaten 2-1 away to Slovakia in October, are second on 12 points, three ahead of Ukraine.

"It was a difficult game, they are very tough, very physical," Morata, who was playing in place of the injured Diego Costa, said in an interview with Spanish television.

"It wasn't my best game but now I just need to keep working to get another chance in the team," added the Juventus forward, who was making only his third appearance for La Roja.

Spain had the upper hand for most of the first half, with Andres Iniesta, David Silva and Isco at the heart of their forays forward.

Although chasing the ball for long periods, Ukraine managed to trouble the European champions and midfielder Ruslan Rotan lashed an effort narrowly wide

moments before Morata struck.

Sergio Ramos nodded against the frame of the goal from a David Silva free kick and Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas had to be alert to keep out a Rotan free kick either side of halftime.

Spain lost control in the second period as Ukraine pushed hard for an equaliser and the excellent Rotan twice tested Casillas with powerful efforts.

Spain substitute Santi Cazorla came close to a second for the home side three minutes from time but Pyatov pulled off a superb finger-tip save.

The next match for Spain, unbeaten in 30 competitive home games since they lost 1-0 to Greece in 2003, is a friendly on Tuesday against the Netherlands in Amsterdam, a repeat of the 2010 World Cup final.

RESULTS	
Macedonia 1 (Trajkovski 9)	Belarus 2 (Kalachev 44, Kornilenko 82)
Slovakia 3 (Nemec 10, Weiss 21, Pekarik 40)	Luxembourg 0
Spain 1 (Morata 28)	Ukraine 0
England 4 (Rooney 6, Welbeck 45, Sterling 58, Kane 73)	Lithuania 0
Slovenia 6 (Ilicic 10, Kampf 49, Andraz Struna 50, Novakovic 52, Lazarevic 73, B Ilic 88)	San Marino 0
Switzerland 3 (Schaer 17, Xhaka 27, Seferovic 80)	Estonia 0
Liechtenstein 0	Austria 5 (Harnik 14, Janko 16, Alaba 59, Junuzovic 74, Arnautovic 90+3)
Moldova 0	Sweden 2 (Ibrahimovic 46, 84-pen)
Montenegro v Russia - match abandoned after 66 minutes	

# Marchisio injury not serious

AFP, Milan

Serie A champions Juventus have played down the extent of a knee injury suffered by Claudio Marchisio after the midfielder was sidelined by Italy medical staff who claimed his season was over.

Marchisio was ruled out of Saturday's Euro 2016 qualifier away to Bulgaria after undergoing an MRI scan which revealed a torn anterior cruciate knee ligament injury.

However the Juve midfielder could return to competition within a matter of weeks after Juventus announced the injury is not as bad as first thought.

"After returning from international duty on Friday afternoon, Claudio Marchisio underwent medical examinations conducted by Juventus' club doctors and Dr. Flavio Quaglia," said a club statement.

"The 29-year-old then underwent an MRI scan on his right knee this evening (Friday). Marchisio will now rest and his condition is to be monitored on a day-to-day basis."

# Kane makes perfect debut

AFP, London



England manager Roy Hodgson backed Harry Kane to enjoy a long and distinguished international career after the Tottenham Hotspur striker marked his debut with a goal after only 80 seconds.

With Kane having scored 29 goals for Spurs this season, there was huge expectation about his England bow and the 21-year-old duly delivered, rising from the bench to score the fourth goal of a one-sided 4-0 win over Lithuania in Friday's Euro 2016 qualifier at Wembley.

Kane will now hope to start in Tuesday's friendly against Italy in Turin and Hodgson said that he had no qualms about the striker's ability to handle the increased attention that his goal is certain to generate.

"I think he'll put pressure on himself because he's a good professional," Hodgson told his post-match press conference.

"I don't think he's a person who'll buckle under pressure, but he'll have to accept the media spotlight, which is already enormous, will get bigger."

"But he's in good hands with (manager) Mauricio Pochettino at Tottenham and us here. We'll make sure we don't built him up to knock him down, but build him up to be a big part of our future."

"He is still a young man, but what could be better than making his debut and scoring a goal? Wayne Rooney did it and never looked back."

Rooney opened the scoring against Lithuania in the sixth minute by heading in after Danny Welbeck's shot was parried by goalkeeper Gedrius Arlauskis.

It took the Manchester United striker to 47 England goals -- two shy of Bobby Charlton's all-time record.

Man-of-the-match Welbeck made it 2-0 with a header that deflected in off Tadas Kijanskas and Rooney then teed up Raheem Sterling to tap in his first England goal in the 58th minute.

# Trio to leave England squad

AFP, London

England manager Roy Hodgson revealed on Friday that Raheem Sterling, Leighton Baines and James Milner will all drop out of the squad for next week's friendly with Italy.

Southampton left-back Ryan Bertrand has been brought into the squad, while Danny Welbeck is a doubt for the game after injuring his knee during Friday's 4-0 win over Lithuania.



Two teams of transgenders compete against each other during a football tournament organised by the Bangladesh Hijra Sporting Club at the Adhar Chandra Model High School ground in Savar yesterday.

# Russia-Montenegro tie abandoned

AFP, Podgorica



The Euro 2016 qualifier between Montenegro and Russia in Podgorica on Friday was abandoned with the score at 0-0 after trouble forced the German referee to stop play on two separate occasions.

Referee Deniz Aytekin first stopped play for around half an hour after visiting goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev was struck by a flare and eventually abandoned the match altogether after more missiles were thrown from the stand in the second half.

Akinfeev, 28, was hit on the right shoulder by a flare thrown from behind the goal at the Gradski Stadion just moments after the start of the qualifying Group G fixture.

The CSKA Moscow goalkeeper was stretchered off and taken to hospital as a precaution, while Aytekin ordered the players off the pitch and called a halt to the match.

UEFA doctor Slobodan Mandic went with Akinfeev and said the goalkeeper was conscious.

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