

# Lallana steals a win

## England beat Slovakia at the death

AFP, Trnava

Adam Lallana scored with the last kick of the match as England edged 10-man Slovakia 1-0 in Sam Allardyce's first game as manager in World Cup qualifying on Sunday. Despite Slovakia having Martin Skrtel sent off in the 57th minute, Allardyce looked destined to become the first England manager since Bobby Robson in 1982 not to win his first game in charge. But in the fifth minute of stoppage time at Trnava's City Arena, Lallana squeezed a shot between Slovakia goalkeeper Matus Kozacik's legs to get England up and running in Group F. Allardyce, nicknamed 'Big Sam', succeeded Roy Hodgson after England's humiliating Euro 2016 elimination by Iceland. Kozacik's gaffe enabled him to become the ninth England manager to start his tenure with a win. Lallana's goal spared England from a repeat of the result from their group-stage encounter with Slovakia at Euro 2016. It also meant that captain Wayne Rooney finished as a winner on a night when he won his 116th cap to become England's most-capped outfield player. Allardyce had vowed that Rooney would no longer play as a number 10 on his watch, but the captain nonetheless lined up in midfield

beside Jordan Henderson in a 4-1-4-1 system. With Raheem Sterling hugging the touchline on the right and Lallana flitting infield from the left, it left lone striker Harry Kane isolated. It took England until mid-way through the first half to present Kane with anything approaching a shooting chance and when Kyle Walker picked him out at the near post, the number nine missed his kick. Allardyce shuffled his pack at half-time, switching Sterling and Lallana and pushing Rooney upfield. Rooney then registered England's first shot on target in the 65th minute, a weak curler that Kozacik pushed away uncertainly, before Sterling almost caught the Slovakia goalkeeper out with an improvised chip. Allardyce sent on Dele Alli and Theo Walcott for Henderson and Sterling, while Daniel Sturridge replaced Kane late on. The Liverpool midfielder continued to look like England's best chance of a goal, with one shot parried by Kozacik and another fizzing wide. Walcott found the net in the 90th minute, tucking the ball away after Sturridge's shot was blocked, only for his celebrations to be cut short by an offside flag. But just as it looked as if victory would elude England, Lallana gathered Rose's cross and unleashed a hopeful shot that crept between Kozacik's legs and dribbled into the net.



England midfielder Adam Lallana's 95th minute strike gave England a dramatic win over Slovakia in their 2018 World Cup qualifier yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Stan Wawrinka survived a close call, saving a match point against Britain's Dan Evans before powering his way to victory in their US Open third round clash.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Stan, Andy into last 16

AFP, New York

Men's contenders Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka clawed their way into the last 16 of the US Open en route to the US Open on Sunday. While Serena Williams had encountered little resistance on way to her 307th win the day before, it was another story for the top men's seeds in action. Wawrinka had the closest call, saving a match point in a 4-6, 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (10/8), 6-2 victory over Britain's Dan Evans. The 31-year-old third seed saved the match point at 5/6 in the fourth set tie-breaker, breaking the will of his opponent. "It's always good to win by saving match point. It's always something special, that's for sure," said Wawrinka, who had his left ankle taped after twisting it during the match. "It was

a tough battle and I'm happy to get through." Many of Murray's troubles against Paolo Lorenzi were of his own making as he allowed the energetic Italian journeyman to make him look ordinary through two sets before pulling himself together to win 7-6 (7/4), 5-7, 6-2, 6-3. Murray takes on Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov, a 6-4, 6-1, 3-6, 6-2 winner over Portugal's Joao Sousa, for a quarter-final berth. Wawrinka next faces 63rd-ranked Ukrainian Illya Marchenko, who advanced when Nick Kyrgios, hobbled by a painful right hip, retired while trailing 4-6, 6-4, 6-1. Kyrgios soldiered on after receiving treatment at the end of the second set before opting out at the end of the third. Sixth-seeded Kei Nishikori of Japan, two years removed from his run to the final, rallied for a 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 win over France's Nicolas Mahut. Nishikori will take on Ivo Karlovic for a quarterfinal berth.

# Ventura confident ahead of opener

AFP, Haifa



New Italy coach Giampiero Ventura said he was unconcerned by Thursday's home defeat to France ahead of his team's opening World Cup qualifier in Israel on Monday.

The 2006 World Cup champions slumped to a 3-1 defeat in Bari on Thursday but Ventura, who took over the Azzurri hotseat from new Chelsea manager Antonio Conte, does not expect such a stern test in Haifa. "With the greatest of respect, Israel aren't France. We will analyse (the) match, we'll look at some errors that we can avoid and I'm sure we'll put in a better performance," Ventura, 68, said. Even so, there is anxiety in the Italian camp with striker Graziano Pelle, who scored against France, insisting: "There are no excuses, we must beat Israel." Italy are expected to battle with Spain for top spot in Group G and the only automatic qualification place. The 2010 world champions begin their campaign against minnows Liechtenstein while Albania and Macedonia round out the group. The winners of each group will qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia, while the eight best runners-up advance to the play-offs. Midfield orchestrator Marco Verratti, who missed the 2016 European Championships due to injury, says Italy are up against it. "We have been put in a difficult group, but if we do what what we can then we have a good chance of getting through," he said. The usually deep-lying ball-player says he will operate a more advanced role under Ventura. "I often speak with Ventura about my position on the pitch. Playmakers are often man-marked and so the coach wants to play me as an attacking midfielder, which I'm comfortable with," said the 23-year-old Paris Saint-Germain star. "Compared to before (under Conte), we perhaps look to keep the ball more in order to create space where we can do damage." Centre-back Leonardo Bonucci will play despite worries about his young son's health, but the injured veteran Daniele De Rossi will miss out for Italy.

# Pakistan get some solace

REUTERS, Cardiff

Pakistan's Sarfraz Ahmed and Shoaib Malik shared a fluent partnership of 163 to lead the tourists to a consolation four-wicket win over England in the fifth and final one-day international in Cardiff on Sunday. The hosts, put into bat, mustered a respectable 302 for nine from 50 overs but their bowling lacked penetration and Pakistan reached the victory target with 10 balls to spare. England, who won the series 4-1, never produced the explosive power that has characterised their recent one-day batting. Jason Roy made 87 off 89 balls and Ben Stokes 75 off 76 but they lost wickets at regular intervals, Pakistan seamer Hasan Ali completing figures of 4-60. **SCORES IN BRIEF:** ENGLAND: 302 for 9 in 50 overs (Roy 87, Stokes 75; Ali 4-60, Amir 3-50) PAKISTAN: 304 for 6 in 48.2 overs (Malik 77, Sarfraz 90, Azhar 33; Dawson 2-70, Wood 2-56) **Result:** Pakistan won by but lost the 5-match series 4-1. **Player-of-the-match:** Sarfraz Ahmed. **Player-of-the-series:** Joe Root.

# France open to Benzema return

REUTERS, Paris



The president of the French Football Federation (FFF) has opened the door for striker Karim Benzema to return to the national team when legal proceedings against him for alleged blackmail have finished. The striker was suspended indefinitely by the FFF in December 2015 after being put under formal investigation by a judge for an alleged plot to blackmail France team mate Mathieu Valbuena over a sex video. Benzema denies any wrongdoing. He subsequently missed the European Championship finals on home soil in June and July. FFF president Noel Le Graet has said the striker will be available for selection, but the final decision will rest with coach Didier Deschamps. "I am against lifetime punishments. Benzema needs to go through the courts, we won't take a risk, whatever it might be," the FFF president told L'Equipe on Sunday. "He already missed the Euros, that's something. "The problem hasn't been raised for the moment, but he's available for selection," he added. "The day when justice will be done, only then will Didier decide whether to integrate him or not." No court date has been set in Benzema's case. Benzema is yet to feature for Real Madrid in La Liga this season as he recovers from a hip injury. Since the Euros, he has missed France's 3-1 friendly victory over Italy in Bari on Sept. 1 and will not play in their World Cup qualifier in Belarus on Tuesday.



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