



Marco Asensio provided the spark and dynamism from the right and racked up three assists to go with his goal as a new-look Spain annihilated World Cup finalists Croatia 6-0 in a UEFA Nations League match on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

WHAT THEY SAID

"I wouldn't want to finish my career with the number 20 shirt, I say everything with that. If I wanted to change it? Yes, we will see what happens."

Marco Asensio

"The attitude of all the players has been very good. It is difficult to criticise anything in a match that saw such a high level of performance. I have nothing to object against; I liked almost everything I saw."

Luis Enrique

"We cannot cry about it, we have to improve. What happened has happened, all their chances have gone in and it is better that it happened today than later. After the first goal we were not so focused – and after the second goal, the match was over for us."

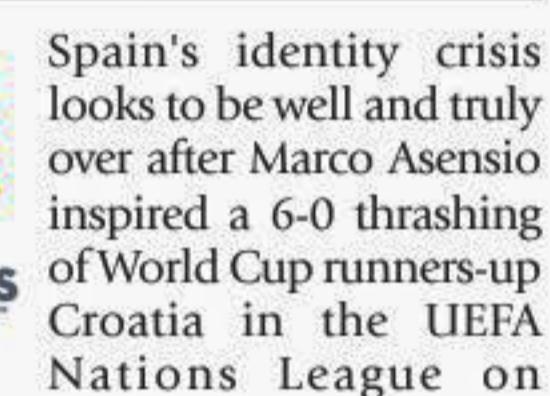
Zlatko Dalic

"The future is here"

Headline of Spanish Daily Sport

Perfect Spain condemn Croatia

AFP, Elche



Spain's identity crisis looks to be well and truly over after Marco Asensio inspired a 6-0 thrashing of World Cup runners-up Croatia in the UEFA Nations League on Tuesday.

Defeat to Russia in July prompted a change of coach and doubts about the Spanish passing style but after an impressive win over England at Wembley, Luis Enrique has now overseen a demolition of Croatia too.

Asensio's two long-range shots, the second cannoning in off goalkeeper Lovre Kalinic, had Spain three up before half-time in Elche, after Saul Niguez had earlier headed home.

Croatia, abject at the back, were no better after the break. Asensio first threaded Rodrigo Moreno through to finish before supplying the corner for an unmarked Sergio Ramos to nod in number five.

Iscó then flashed a sixth into the top corner, again Asensio the provider.

Two victories in four days mean Spain sit top of League A's Group Two, with a six-point gap over both Croatia and England, who play each other in Rijeka next month.

VITALS

Real Madrid's representatives outnumbered Barcelona 6-1 in the starting Spanish line up and ended up 6-0. Carvajal, Sergio Ramos, Nacho, Dani Ceballos, Isco and Asensio up against Sergio Busquets, who was replaced by Rodrigo. It has been 16 years since Real has had six players in the national team.

Asensio got off the mark in the Spain shirt against Croatia on his 17th appearance for his country, and the wait was perhaps worth it.

6-0 was Croatia's heaviest defeat eclipsing the previous low of a 5-1 thrashing by England.

Real Madrid and Barcelona teammates in the tunnel and Croatia started brightly, with Ivan Santini missing two decent early chances from close range. But they drifted away after Spain's opening goal. They had no response. The second half was painful; it was as if all they could aspire to was for the final whistle to blow.

LUKAKU BRACE INSPIRES

BELGIUM

Romelu Lukaku scored two goals as World Cup semi-finalists Belgium began their Nations League campaign with a comfortable 3-0 win away to Iceland on Tuesday.

Eden Hazard converted a 29th-minute penalty after a foul on Lukaku, with the Manchester United striker netting a quick-fire second before adding a third in the closing stages.

Lukaku, also on the mark in Friday's 4-0 friendly defeat of Scotland, was brought down by a clumsy tackle from Sverrir Ingason and Hazard rolled the resulting spot-kick to the left of Hannes Halldorsson.

He then got himself on the score-sheet two minutes later by following up a rebound after a powerful Vincent Kompany header was pawed into his path by Halldorsson.

Thomas Meunier struck the outside of the post on the hour, although Belgium ultimately transformed their dominance into a third with nine minutes to play as Lukaku slotted away a fizzing cross from Dries Mertens.

Roberto Martinez's side move level on three points with Switzerland, who demolished Iceland 6-0 in St Gallen on Saturday.



France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris walks out of the Westminster Magistrates Court in London after his hearing on Wednesday. He had been arrested for drink-driving four days after lifting the World Cup and was handed a 20-month driving ban and a £50,000 fine.

PHOTO: AFP



Rashford fires England

AFP, Leicester

England manager Gareth Southgate recognised his side have vast room for improvement despite bouncing back from three consecutive defeats as a much-changed team edged past Switzerland for a 1-0 friendly win thanks to Marcus Rashford's winner.

However, the Three Lions again failed to hit the heights from their World Cup campaign, particularly in a poor first 45 minutes that provoked strong words between the players at half-time.

Southgate, though, did at least stave off an unwanted record of becoming the first England boss to oversee four straight defeats and further puncture the feel-good factor of a run to the World Cup semifinals.

"It's not been a perfect week by any means but we finish with a win, which is important moving forward," said Southgate.

"We had a tactical problem to sort out and so many lads playing their first 45 minutes of the season," he added of the first-half display.

"It was a tall order to ask them to play against an excellent Switzerland side, they kept the ball well and we had to chase too much. There was plenty of room for improvement."

The two teams could have met in the quarterfinals in Russia had the Swiss not limped out of the competition with a whimper to Sweden in the last 16.

"We could have been two or three nil down at half-time," said England full-back Danny Rose. "It's great we can all shout at each other and tell each other to improve like we did."

Richarlison shines in rout

Colombia hold Argentina to goalless draw

REUTERS, Landover

A double from Richarlison on his first international start helped Brazil to a 5-0 win over El Salvador in Maryland on Tuesday.

Brazil ran out with a new-look side, with coach Tite giving debuts to goalkeeper Neto and full-back Eder Militao as well as first starts to Richarlison at centre forward and Arthur in midfield.

The new boys looked completely at home against a team ranked 72nd in the world and Brazil took just three minutes to open the scoring when Neymar slotted home a penalty after Richarlison had been brought down in the box.

Richarlison got his name on the scoresheet 13 minutes later when he curled a spectacular shot into the top corner from 15 meters out and on the half hour mark Brazil made it 3-0, Phillippe Coutinho firing home from the edge of the box after Neymar laid the ball into his path.

Both sides made changes at half-time but the five-times world champions took just five more

I do not know what I have to do to live with it [this reputation], there's no way I'm going to stand for a situation like this. I think it has to end but it's not up to me. It's a lack of respect, not just with me, but with my teammates as well. If he does not want to give the penalty, it's not a problem, but the card is unnecessary.

NEYMAR ON THE REFEREE, WHO BOOKED THE BRAZIL CAPTAIN FOR SIMULATION

minutes to get a fourth goal, with Richarlison scoring his second when he pounced onto a loose ball to rifle home a low shot from inside the box.

Marquinhos got Brazil a fifth in the final minute when he headed home a corner from Neymar.

Brazil's new boy Richarlison carried over his sublime early season form for Everton by scoring twice on his full start for Brazil as the Selecao inflicted a bruising 5-0 defeat on El Salvador on Tuesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



'IF HE CAN GET TO 600 THAT WOULD BE INCREDIBLE'

James Anderson says he has no plans to hang up his boots yet after overtaking Glenn McGrath to become the most prolific fast bowler in Test history as the Australian challenged the Englishman to reach 600 wickets. "When I sit down at the end of my career, when I finish, it will mean a hell of a lot to me to be able to see what I've achieved," he said. "But right now it's hard when you put all your energy into the present and trying to perform well for England. That's all I really focus on." McGrath posted a message of congratulations on Instagram and told BBC Radio: "If he can raise the bar to 600 wickets, that's an incredible effort. Being a fast bowler is the toughest part of the game and injuries do play a part. To think that Jimmy's played for so long and continued at the top of his game shows his work ethic, his physical and mental strength and everything else that goes into it." McGrath added: "The game is quicker, it's faster. And will bowlers play enough Test cricket in the future to get anywhere near the mark?"

— REUTERS



Lloris gets 20-month drink-driving ban

REUTERS, London

France's World Cup-winning captain Hugo Lloris has been banned from driving for 20 months and fined after pleading guilty to a charge of drink driving, British media reported on Wednesday.

The 31-year-old Tottenham Hotspur goalkeeper admitted being more than twice above the drink-drive limit of 35 micrograms when he was stopped by police in central London last month.

Lloris, who won the World Cup with France in July, was fined 50,000 pounds (\$65,130) at Westminster Magistrates' court.

Prosecutor Henry Fitch said police found Lloris in an unmarked car driving at 15mph in a 30mph zone.

The court heard that Lloris veered his car

"towards parked vehicles" before correcting himself and went through a red light.

David Sonn, defending, said the "spectacular fall from grace" was not lost on Lloris.

"On July 15 he was arguably the proudest man on the planet (having captained France to a World Cup triumph)," Sonn was quoted as saying by the BBC.

"Just 40 days later, he was arrested. He experienced the indignity of being handcuffed and put in a police station overnight."

Magistrate Amanda Barron said it was "pure luck" that Lloris did not cause damage to other vehicles or pedestrians.

Joshua Harris, director of campaigns for British road safety charity Brake, said it was disappointing to see a role model such as Lloris admitting to breaking the law by drink driving.

AFC U-16 C'SHIP QUALIFIERS Bahrain arrive

SPORTS REPORTER

Bahrain became the first team to arrive in Dhaka to take part in the first round of qualification for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, which will get underway on Saturday at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Vietnam and hosts Bangladesh are the other teams in the five-team Group E from where the champions will advance to the second round.

Six group champions and two best runners-up teams will play in the second round, from where four teams will qualify for the eight-team final phase, a stage Bangladesh played last year after becoming qualifying group champions in Dhaka.

This time, hosts Bangladesh, who recently became runners-up in SAFF U-15 Women's Championship, will play their first match against Bahrain on September 17 before facing Lebanon, UAE and Vietnam on September 19, 21 and 23 respectively.

Cheryshev in doping probe

AFP, Moscow

Russia winger Denis Cheryshev, one of the standout performers at the World Cup, is under investigation for an alleged doping violation, local media reported Wednesday.

"This case is currently being investigated by the Spanish Anti-Doping agency," the Russian daily Sport Express quoted a World Anti-Doping Agency press spokesperson as saying.