



Italy midfielder Marco Verratti (R) celebrates his winning goal with teammate Giorgio Chiellini during their Euro 2020 Group J qualifier against Bosnia Herzegovina at the Allianz Stadium in Turin on Tuesday.

Italy edge Bosnia

Germany, France stroll

AFP, Paris



Italy needed a late winner from Marco Verratti to defeat a determined Bosnia-Herzegovina 2-1 in Euro 2020 qualifying Tuesday, while Germany and France piled up the goals in lopsided victories.

Edin Dzeko fired Bosnia in front in Turin, but Lorenzo Insigne equalised shortly after half-time and Verratti curled home on 86 minutes to earn a fourth win in as many attempts for Roberto Mancini's side in Group J.

"I expected the difficulties, but we showed the strength and the conviction to overturn it," said Mancini.

"The important thing is that we are first in the group."

World champions France rebounded from last weekend's defeat in Turkey with a trouble-free 4-0 win away to minnows Andorra.

"We reacted well after not playing to our usual level on Saturday against a good Turkey team. It looked easy today and the intensity wasn't the same but we played really well," said France coach Didier Deschamps.

He retained just four of those who began Saturday's 2-0 loss in Konya, handing first international starts to Kurt Zouma, Clement Lenglet and Leo Dubois.

Kylian Mbappe opened the scoring with a chipped finish on 11 minutes, with

Wissam Ben Yedder and Florian Thauvin adding to their lead in the first half.

Zouma bundled home a fourth on the hour as France reclaimed top spot in Group H after Iceland beat Turkey 2-1 in Reykjavik to further sour the mood in the visiting camp.

Two headers in the first half by centre-back Ragnar Sigurdsson saw Iceland draw level on nine points with France as well as Turkey, for whom Dorukhan Tokoz scored a consolation.

Germany made light work of Estonia as Serge Gnabry and Marco Reus fired them to a thundering 8-0 victory in Mainz.

Gnabry and Reus scored two goals each, with Leon Goretzka, Ilkay Gundogan, Timo Werner and Leroy Sane also on target, as Germany ran riot to seal a third win from three games in Group C.

Underdogs Estonia were helpless against a bright young Germany side who now appear to have left last year's World Cup woes far behind them.

Joachim Loew's team are still playing catch-up to Northern Ireland after Paddy McNair struck four minutes from the end in a 1-0 victory in Belarus.

Belgium extended their perfect start to Group I with a 3-0 defeat of Scotland in Brussels.

Romelu Lukaku headed in an Eden Hazard cross on the stroke of half-time and bagged a second early in the second half, with Kevin De Bruyne thumping home another at the death.

Tunisia surprise Croatia

AFP, Johannesburg

Naim Sliti converted a penalty to give Tunisia a 2-1 away win over Croatia Tuesday in a warm-up match for the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, which kicks off on June 21 in Egypt.

Croatia were runners-up to France in the 2018 World Cup and after defeating Wales last Saturday in a Euro 2020 qualifier, were expected to defeat the Carthage Eagles.

But it was the north Africans who made an early breakthrough with Anice Badri from African champions Esperance Tunis scoring on 16 minutes.

Bruno Petkovic levelled two minutes into the second half and Sliti netted from a 70th-minute spot-kick to lift Tunisian morale ahead of the African tournament.

Tunisia, whose lone Cup of Nations title came in 2004 when they were hosts, are in Group E with Angola, Mali and debutants Mauritania.

'Great opportunity to play against much better teams'

SPORTS REPORTER



Due to the experience of Bhutan debacle during the pre-qualifiers of 2019 Asian Cup in 2016, a fear of failing again engulfed almost everyone when Bangladesh were placed in the pre-qualifiers for 2022 World Cup due to their lowly FIFA Ranking.

The anxiety apparently increased among the football stakeholders when the men in red and green got Laos, a team who are ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA ranking, in the 12-team pre-qualifying draw. However, shrugging off all the worries, the youthful Bangladesh team successfully overcame the Laos hurdle to qualify for the 40-team World Cup Qualifiers, under the astute guidance of English coach Jamie Day.

Since starting work with Bangladesh team in May last year, the 39-year brought some visible changes in the squad full of young players, who now believe they can win matches and can fight till the last minute with whatever strength they have. Day is a realistic tactician, who applies sensible strategies his charges can carry out on the pitch. Tuesday's second-leg against Laos was another example of his realistic game plan.

"I think they have shown that Bangladesh is now not an easy opponent to play against and we can now win matches as well," Day said. "I think young and old ones have improved both on and off the pitch which has helped their performance."

Even though the football fans are ecstatic over Bangladesh's qualification for the next round, the performance of the team during the two legs could not quite satisfy the spectators. And the style of football is not expected to change in near future until quality players come out to replace the older ones. Day is logically not going to adopt eye-catching football, instead his focus will be on result-oriented performance over his next one-year tenure.

"We'll look at some other players not because the ones we have had not done well, but because there are some older players in the squad. Potentially we might look to bring in some younger players in the squad because we want to play for the future. We need experience within the squad, but we have some good young players coming through. It gives me time to look at these younger players and if we need to swap a couple of players, we'll do that going

into September," said Day, who is leaving for England tomorrow.

Advancing into World Cup Qualifiers meant Bangladesh will get to play eight matches against some of the stronger Asian nations, with the draw scheduled to take place in the middle of July. The coach thinks the group-stage matches will be a good platform for the young players to gather experience.

"Realistically, there will be a lot of better teams in the group. We'll play like we normally do. I think it will be a good experience for the younger boys who have not had that experience. Mamunul [Islam] has played in Australia, so you have that, but the younger ones - [Mahbubur Rahman] Sufil, Biplo [Ahmed], Rabiul [Hasan] - it gives them an opportunity to play against much better opponents and players that they want to reach that level.

"I think it will be a good learning curve for us and further down the line we can use that experience to hopefully finish not near the bottom, but near the top of the group," Day said, adding that he is likely to start preparation for September's World Cup Qualifiers at the end of August after preparing a plan with the game's governing body soon.

Archers fail to earn quota place

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's hopes of earning a quota place in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics fell apart when the men in red and green failed to make it to the men's recurve team event's quarterfinals in Hyundai World Archery Championships after losing in 6-2 sets against South Korea in pre-quarterfinals in Netherlands yesterday.

Eight quarterfinalists in men's recurve team event will get direct entry to the Olympics. Bangladesh needed to create a small piece of history, but the defeat against Olympic gold medalists South Korea was always expected.

However, it can be considered a positive outcome that Bangladesh team, comprising Ruman Sana, Tamimul Islam and Hakib Ahmed Rubel, won a set against South Korea after having fought hard in the first two sets. There was even an opportunity to win the fourth set when Korea scored 56 out of 60, but Bangladesh managed to score only 50.

In compound individual events, Ashim Kumar Das and Susmita Banik were eliminated from the first round after moving into the elimination round.

Das, who became 80th out of 137 archers in qualification round, lost by 134-147 points against England's Adam Ravenscroft while Banik, who finished 60th among 97 archers in qualification round, fought neck and neck with Estonian archer Emily Hoim before suffering narrowly a 137-134 points defeat in the first round.

Bangladesh will now fight in recurve individual and recurve mixed events.

Neymar's rape accuser abandoned by lawyer

AFP, Sao Paulo

The woman who has accused Brazilian football star Neymar of raping her in a Paris hotel has been dropped by a third lawyer -- the latest twist in a scandal that has gripped the country.

Danilo Garcia de Andrade told broadcaster SBT late Monday he was no longer representing Najila Trindade Mendes de Souza after she questioned his competence.

Trindade alleges Neymar sexually assaulted her in the French capital last

month, a charge he denies.

Garcia took on Trindade's lawsuit against Neymar last week, but days later, he reportedly said he was considering withdrawing from the case unless the model provided more evidence of wrongdoing.

The lawyer wanted to see the content of a seven-minute video filmed during the model's second meeting with the Paris Saint-Germain star.

Trindade maintains the recording -- a few seconds of which have been leaked on social media -- includes conclusive evidence that she was assaulted.

Khaled out for 3 to 4 months

SPORTS REPORTER

Right-arm pacer Khaled Ahmed, who has played two Tests for Bangladesh, has damaged his left-knee meniscus and will be needing a surgery that will see the 26-year old out of action for about three to four months, informed Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday.

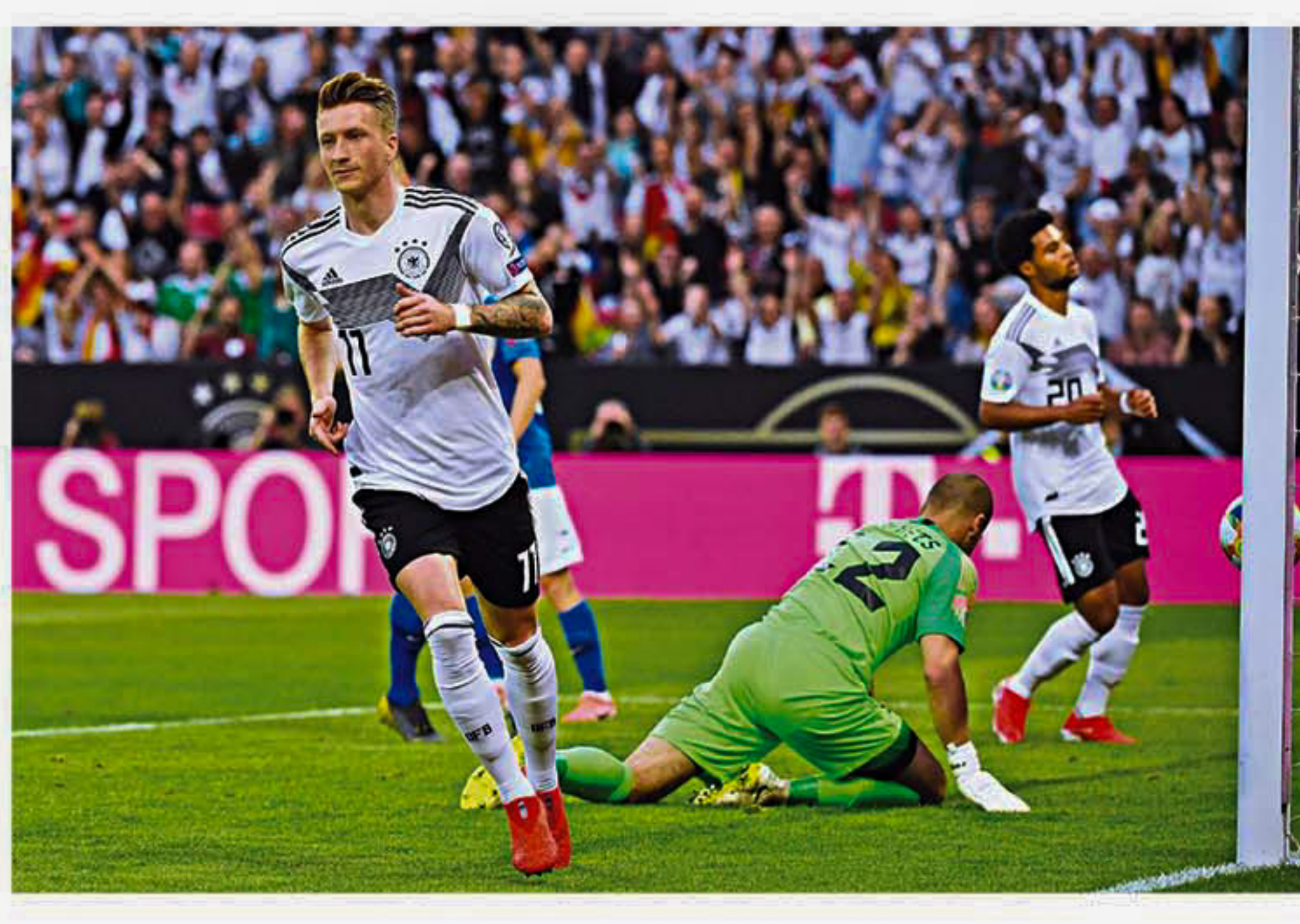
Khaled hurt his knee when he tried to move his leg after he felt a muscle cramp during the Eid break while watching a World Cup game of Bangladesh at his hometown.

"As per the MRI report, Khaled had damaged his meniscus on the left knee to an extent that there is no alternative to a surgery," BCB physio Bayzid Islam Khan told reporters.

"He will be out for at least three to four months after completing the surgery," he added.

Germany forward Marco Reus celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Estonia during their Euro 2020 Group C qualifier in Mainz on Tuesday. Germany thrash Estonia 8-0.

PHOTO: AFP



Reus not getting carried away

AFP, Mainz



Marco Reus warned Germany not to get ahead of themselves after they maintained a perfect record in their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign with a thundering 8-0 victory over Estonia in Mainz on Tuesday.

Underdogs Estonia were helpless against a bright young Germany side who appeared to have left last year's World Cup woes far behind them as they rampaged to a third win from three games in Group C.

Yet Reus told broadcaster RTL he

and his team had to be "realistic".

"Opponents like this are not the benchmark for us. It was important for us to get into a rhythm and get to know each other better on the pitch, but we have to stay realistic," he said.

Captain and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer, meanwhile, said the team could be "proud" of their dominant performance on Tuesday.

The floodgates opened on ten minutes when Ilkay Gundogan started a slick move which saw Reus fire in the opener.

The goal set the tone for the rest of the first half, as Gundogan and Joshua Kimmich tormented the

Estonian back line with devastating through balls.

Gundogan was the orchestrator again when Gnabry doubled the lead, and Germany were 3-0 up after 20 minutes Leon Goretzka flicked in a floating ball from Kimmich.

The fourth goal would have been almost identical to the third had Joonas Tamm not hauled Goretzka to the ground inside the box. As it was, Gundogan smashed in the resulting penalty.

Come the 37th minute, it was Reus' turn again, the Borussia Dortmund star finding the bottom corner with a fizzing free-kick from 20 metres.



Real Madrid's new signing Serbian forward Luka Jovic (L) poses with club president Florentino Perez during his official presentation at the Bernabeu yesterday.

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