

25 From Russia to Leicester and back for record-breaking Musa

26 Federer beats Kudla to book 12th career final at Halle

27 Rampant Mexico see off South Korea to close on last 16



10-man Germany beat Sweden 2-1

Late Kroos strike against Sweden keeps Germany alive



SOCHI: Germany's midfielder Ilkay Gundogan (L) kicks the ball during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group F football match between Germany and Sweden at the Fisht Stadium in Sochi yesterday.— AFP

SOCHI: Toni Kroos rescued holders Germany from the brink of an unthinkable early World Cup exit here yesterday, curling home a sensational winner in the fifth minute of stoppage time to seal a 2-1 win over Sweden.

The 10-man reigning champions were in deep trouble when Kroos stepped up to steer in his dramatic winner in the final minute of time added on at Sochi's Fisht Stadium. Before that, a Kroos error had led to Ola Toivonen giving Sweden a 32nd-minute lead and even a Marco Reus equaliser early in the second half appeared to be only a temporary stay of execution for Joachim Loew's men.

But the rescue act from Kroos, who had endured another difficult night in the German midfield, is a huge lift to a side who saw Jerome Boateng sent off late in the game. They now have qualification for the last 16 back in

their own hands ahead of their final Group F game against South Korea on Wednesday.

There is still no guarantee that they will avoid the fate of the last two World Cup holders, with Spain four years ago and Italy in 2010 both being knocked out in the group stage. Not since 1938 have Germany been eliminated from the World Cup in the first round. However, this result, and the manner of it, will provide an almighty boost to the Germans and is a hammer blow to Sweden, who will face off with Mexico in their last match with all still to play for.

Germany coach Joachim Loew wielded the axe following the shambolic 1-0 loss at the hands of Mexico with which they began their defence of the trophy, with the much-criticised Mesut Ozil and Sami Khedira dropped while Mats Hummels missed out due to injury.

Marco Reus, Sebastian Rudy and Antonio Ruediger were among those who came into the team. But just like against Mexico, Germany's usual composure was not there. Sweden should have had an early penalty when Marcus Berg was released on goal and, at the point of shooting, was fouled by Boateng. Berg's effort was saved by Manuel Neuer. Boateng played the man and not the ball, but there was no penalty given and no recourse to the Video Assistant Referee.

It was a warning for the Germans, who were then dealt a body blow—literally—when Rudy was left with a bloody nose after receiving a stray boot in the face. Ilkay Gundogan replaced him, coming in alongside Kroos, but it was the Real Madrid man who was at fault as Sweden went in front just a minute later.

His pass was pounced upon by the Swedes, who

sprung forward, Viktor Claesson picking out Toivonen to control on his chest and lift the ball over Neuer with the aid of a slight deflection. Loew sent on Mario Gomez in place of Julian Draxler at half-time, and it took just three minutes of the second half for the equaliser to arrive.

Timo Werner's low centre from the left was behind Gomez, who got a touch but not enough to put off Reus from bundling it in. They then set off in search of the winner, with Gomez twice coming close and fellow substitute Julian Brandt smacking a post late on.

Boateng had already walked by then, seeing a second yellow in the 82nd minute for a foul on Berg. Hope looked to be gone, but then Kroos exchanged passes with Reus at a free-kick on the left edge of the box and sent a sweet strike into the far corner.— AFP

Lukaku, Hazard power Belgium to brink of World Cup last 16

MOSCOW: Eden Hazard says Belgium want to go all the way to the World Cup final after the Red Devils threw down a marker to group rivals England with a 5-2 thrashing of Tunisia yesterday. Having lost to Argentina in the quarter-finals at the last World Cup, Hazard says Belgium are a better team than four years ago and are targeting the final in Russia.

"We are a good team, we want to reach the final and we are stronger than four years ago," said the Chelsea star and Belgium captain who capped a man-of-the-match performance with two goals against Tunisia on Saturday. "The match was easy because we scored after five minutes and knew Tunisia would leave spaces as they needed to win, making it easier for us." Belgium ran riot to top Group G as

Romelu Lukaku scored twice to draw level with Cristiano Ronaldo at the top of the World Cup goalscoring charts with four goals two a double strike.

Michy Batshuayi came off the bench to grab Belgium's fifth. The win puts the Red Devils on the brink of the last 16 and they face Tunisia's consolation goals came from defender Dylan Bronn and captain Wahbi Khazri. However, victory came at a cost before Belgium's final group game against England next Thursday as Lukaku is rated doubtful with an ankle injury, but Hazard should recover from a calf knock.

Manchester United's Lukaku, who also scored twice in the opening 3-0 win against Panama, showed clinical finishing for his first-half goals. Belgium coach Roberto Martinez criticised his side for starting slowly against Panama, but they flew out of the blocks in Moscow. Hazard, having been on the receiving end of some bruising tackles in Belgium's opener, was sent tumbling after just five minutes but converted the penalty to open his Russian account.

Midfielder Ferjani Sassi picked up an early booking for complaining when Tunisia's appeals for a penalty fell on deaf ears, just before Belgium added their second goal.

Ali Maaloul's weak pass on the halfway line was collected by Dries Mertens, who sprinted away and put Lukaku clear.

The striker coolly placed his shot past Tunisia keeper Farouk Ben Mustapha in the 16th minute. Tunisia responded two minutes later, Bronn leaping highest to head home a free-kick on 18 minutes, only to be later carried off after landing awkwardly. With half-time approaching, the Belgians grabbed their third goal. After earlier squandering two clear chances created by Kevin De Bruyne, Lukaku converted his third opportunity just before half-time. Thomas Meunier put him in behind the defence and Lukaku tucked his shot away.

The Manchester City midfielder turned provider again after the break for Hazard. The Chelsea star sprinted onto De Bruyne's lofted pass, held off two defenders, rounded keeper Ben Mustapha and tapped home Belgium's fourth goal in the 51st minute.

Knocks forced both Lukaku, then Hazard off in the second-half and for the final 22 minutes Batshuayi came on and had five clear chances before finally converting a cross for Belgium's fifth goal. Tunisia captain Khazri grabbed their second goal just before the final whistle of their second defeat in Russia.— AFP



MOSCOW: Belgium's forward Eden Hazard (L) vies for the ball with Tunisia's forward Fakhreddine Ben Youssef during the Russia 2018 World Cup Group G football match between Belgium and Tunisia at the Spartak Stadium in Moscow yesterday.— AFP