

## Sports

# More history for Iceland, Serbia clinch World Cup spot

## Iceland's second successive appearance at a major tournament

**PARIS:** Iceland qualified for the World Cup for the first time after beating Kosovo 2-0 on Monday, while Serbia clinched a spot at next year's finals with a 1-0 win over Georgia. Everton midfielder Gylfi Sigurdsson and Johann Gudmundsson scored in Reykjavik as Iceland, with a population of just 330,000, became the smallest country to advance to the World Cup finals.

It is the tiny northern European island nation's second successive appearance at a major tournament after their shock win over England in a surprise run to the Euro 2016 quarter-finals.

Iceland needed all three points to secure top spot in European qualifying Group I as Croatia, who sacked coach Ante Cacic last week, downed Ukraine 2-0 in Kiev in the fight to claim second place.

Andrej Kramatic struck twice in the second half to send Croatia into next month's play-offs as Zlatko Dalic took charge of his first match following the 1-1 draw with Finland that prompted the dismissal of Cacic. Aleksandar Prijovic scored after coming on as a second-half substitute to cement Serbia's place in Russia, ending an eight-year major finals absence. Prijovic struck the winner on 74 minutes in Belgrade as Serbia finished top of Group D, with the Republic of Ireland heading to the play-offs after a 1-0 victory over

Wales in Cardiff.

"I think we deserved this, although it turned out that the last step was the most difficult one, but we succeeded," coach Slavoljub Muslin said. Prijovic said the goal was the most important in his career. "It was a dream since (my) childhood to score an important goal for the state," he said.

James McClean broke Welsh hearts with a thunderous 57th-minute strike to keep Irish dreams alive as they leapfrogged their opponents, without the injured Gareth Bale, into second place.

Ireland remain on course for a first World Cup finals appearance since 2002, as surprise Euro 2016 semi-finalists Wales saw their dream of a first trip to the tournament since 1958 turn to dust. "The players were magnificent playing away from home at a very good Welsh side. To win on their territory was a great result for us," Ireland manager Martin O'Neill told Sky Sports.

"We are in the play-offs. Whenever the draw is made we will take our chance."

Asier Illarramendi netted the only goal in Jerusalem as Spain completed their successful qualifying campaign

with a 1-0 win over Israel, while Antonio Candreva grabbed a second-half winner for Italy in a 1-0 victory away to Albania in Group G. — AP



REYKJAVIK: Iceland's Hordur Bjorgvin Magnusson, right, goes for header with Kosovo's Amir Rrahmani second right, during the World Cup Group I qualifying soccer match between Iceland and Kosovo in Reykjavik, Iceland. — AP

"I think we deserved this"

## Italy beat Albania to secure top seed status in playoff

**MILAN:** Italy scraped past Albania 1-0 in its last World Cup qualifier, another poor effort which will do little to inspire confidence in coach Gian Piero Ventura and his team.

Italy was already guaranteed second spot and a playoff berth from Europe Group G, and Antonio Candreva's second-half goal ensured it of top-seed status in the draw.

The Azzurri finished five points behind Spain, which won in Israel 1-0. Macedonia beat Liechtenstein 4-0 in the match between the two bottom sides in the group. "I didn't celebrate when Candreva scored, it seemed right that we were in front, but I was happy, above all for the lads," Ventura said. "We have some limitations at the moment but today there was the desire to try and do things."

"These were the aims that we set ourselves before. We took another small step forward but we continue to give the ball away. ... But I'm happy for them, this is a good group, with a few limitations because of certain absences."

Italy and Ventura came under fire on Friday following a dismal 1-1 draw at home to Macedonia. Without injured key players such as Claudio Marchisio, Daniele De Rossi, Marco Verratti and Andrea Belotti, Ventura opted to employ an experimental 4-2-4 formation in Shkoder. However, the Italian visitors struggled to create anything of note and Ciro Immobile had their only shot on target of the first half but it was saved by goalkeeper Etrit Berisha.

Italy was denied what looked a clear cut penalty shortly before halftime when Eder's cross was stopped by the arm of Freddie Veseli but the referee waved off Azzurri appeals.



SHKODER: Albania's goalkeeper Etrit Berisha, left, saves a shot by Italy's Ciro Immobile, right, as Albania's Frederic Veseli looks on during the World Cup Group G qualifying soccer match between Albania and Italy at Loro Boriçi stadium, in Shkoder. — AP

Albania grew in confidence and almost scored just after the hour mark but Gianluigi Buffon reacted well to parry Eros Grezda's swerving effort - and then shouted in fury at Italy defender Davide Zappacosta.

### AWFUL RECORD

Italy broke the deadlock in the 73rd minute when Leonardo Spinazzola put in a precise cross from the left to

the far post for Candreva to fire into the roof of the net.

Liechtenstein concluded one of the worst qualifying campaigns ever with a 4-0 loss to Macedonia. It finished bottom of the group after losing all 10 of its matches and with a record of 39 goals against and just one for.

Visar Musliu and Aleksandar Trajkovski netted in the first half for Macedonia and Enis Bardi and Arijan Ademi extended the hosts' lead after the interval. — AP

## McClean breaks Welsh hearts as Ireland reach play-offs

**CARDIFF:** The Republic of Ireland claimed a World Cup play-off spot at Wales' expense after James McClean's crisp second-half strike earned his side a 1-0 victory in Cardiff on Monday.

The West Bromwich Albion winger's goal moved Ireland above Wales into second place in Group D below Serbia, meaning Martin O'Neill's men will be one of the eight teams in the European play-off draw on October 17.

"The performance of the players was absolutely fantastic," said Ireland manager O'Neill.

"We had to withstand a lot of pressure, which you would expect. But we had to win tonight in Cardiff and we've done exactly that. James scores a great goal for us and then we have to withstand more pressure. Some great, great performances all round. And so we go to the play-offs." While Ireland remain on course for a first World Cup finals appearance since 2002, surprise Euro 2016 semi-finalists Wales saw their dream of a first appearance at the tournament since 1958 turn to dust.

Bereft of Real Madrid star Gareth Bale, and robbed of Joe Allen by a suspected concussion in the first half, Wales fell to their first defeat in the group and their first loss in a competitive home game in over four years.

The tense game at Cardiff City Stadium stands to be Chris Coleman's last as Wales manager in a competitive fixture, the architect of last year's Euro heroics having pledged to stand down after the current World Cup cycle. "We just came up a bit short tonight," Coleman said. "Our imagination, offensively, we didn't quite have enough. I can't say right now about my future because I'm not thinking about it. The dressing room is full of devastated play-



CARDIFF: Wales' Ashley Williams, center, and Republic of Ireland's Ciaran Clark, right, battle for the ball during the World Cup 2018 Group D qualifying soccer match between Wales and Republic of Ireland at the Cardiff City Stadium, Cardiff. — AP

ers and staff. "The whole nation will be mourning because that elusive World Cup has passed us by again."

Brought into the Wales team in place of Sam Vokes, Hal Robson-Kanu went close early on with a header from a Joe Ledley corner, before Aaron Ramsey saw a crisp drive tipped over by Ireland goalkeeper Darren Randolph.

Wales dominated possession in the first half, creating concern among the green hordes inside the stadium and obliging Ireland to feed off scraps in the final third.

A chance fell to Jeff Hendrick when Cyrus Christie's long throw-in was not cleared, but the Burnley man mis-cued, and Shane Duffy drilled a low shot across the face of the Welsh goal.

Allen and Ramsey were setting the tempo for Wales with their neat footwork and incisive passing, only for the Stoke City midfielder to be forced off in the 37th minute after being caught in a sandwich between McClean and

David Meyler. Jonny Williams came on and the loss of one of Wales' key orchestrators enabled Ireland to gain a foothold for the first time.

Wales started the second half brightly and it took a brilliant acrobatic save from Randolph to prevent Robson-Kanu putting them in front with a header from Jonny Williams's right-wing cross.

But in the 57th minute Ireland struck, Hendrick charging down Ashley Williams's clearance and crossing from the right, Harry Arter dummying and McClean slamming a right-foot shot past a motionless Wayne Hennessey.

It was the first time Wales had fallen behind in the qualifying campaign. Coleman sent on 17-year-old Liverpool forward Ben Woodburn and Vokes, but

Ireland survived heavy late pressure to extend their unbeaten record against their Celtic cousins to eight games and stay in the hunt for Russia. — AP

## Klopp perfect for Liverpool, says former CEO

**LONDON:** Juergen Klopp is the perfect manager to help Liverpool fulfil their ambitions on the pitch despite not being able to match the spending power of the Premier League's richest sides, former chief executive Christian Purslow has said.

The German's success over seven years at Borussia Dortmund, where he challenged the dominance of Bayern Munich, prompted Liverpool's American owners Fenway Sports Group to hire him to spearhead their project.

Twice a Bundesliga champion with Borussia Dortmund, who he also guided to the 2013 Champions League final, Klopp is yet to win a major trophy at the Anfield club but Purslow said he was under no pressure from the hierarchy.

"He's two years into this job that looked to be perfect for Juergen Klopp," Purslow told Sky Sports. "There are great similarities between what he achieved at Dortmund, what he was expected to achieve - which was to compete with an absolute behemoth in Bayern Munich, while spending less money, both on wages and in the transfer market."

"That is the job description at Liverpool," Purslow said Liverpool's bitter Premier League rivals Manchester United, who visit Anfield on Saturday, earn far more revenue than the Merseyside club, adding that Klopp would need time to repeat his Bundesliga success in England.

"There are revenue differences between Manchester United and Liverpool. Liverpool's are still superb but they are a fraction of Manchester United," he added.

"And yet the Liverpool manager is expected to compete with United and beat them, exactly as Klopp did - winning two league titles in Germany against Bayern Munich with a fraction of their spending. "He is perfect for Liverpool. It is an innately difficult project, to compete with less money." Liverpool, seventh on 12 points, have struggled to convert their goal-scoring opportunities this season but will be fired up for Saturday's fixture against a free-scoring United side, who have won six of seven and drawn just once this campaign. — Reuters



Juergen Klopp