

## Sports

# North Macedonia shock Germany as France, England grind out wins

**PARIS:** Germany suffered a stunning 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday, while defending champions France edged Bosnia and Herzegovina 1-0 and England beat a Poland side missing the injured Robert Lewandowski. Napoli midfielder Eljif Elmas secured a famous victory for North Macedonia in Duisburg, scoring five minutes from time to give his country a second win from three Group J matches.

Veteran striker Goran Pandev, 37, put the visitors in front just before half-time but Ilkay Gundogan levelled from the spot after Leroy Sane was fouled in the area. Timo Werner missed a glorious chance after coming off the bench, and Elmas condemned the four-time world champions to a first defeat in qualifying for the global showpiece since 2001 when he steered in a cut-back from Arijan Ademi.

"I don't know how to explain it. It's not easy to do. We knew that we couldn't underestimate the opponent and I don't think we did that. We just weren't good enough," said Gundogan. "It's not quite sunk in yet. This is a victory for the whole nation," said North Macedonia coach Igor Angelovski, whose side will make their European Championship debut this summer.

Germany are level alongside North Macedonia in a section led surprisingly by Armenia, who

won for the third time in as many games thanks to two late goals in a 3-2 victory over Romania. Antoine Griezmann scored the only goal of the game in Sarajevo as France recorded a second away win in four days over Bosnia following their 2-0 success in Kazakhstan at the weekend.

After being held 1-1 at home by Ukraine in their opening game on the road to the 2022 finals in Qatar, France are now in a strong position at the top of Group D. Manchester United defender Harry Maguire struck a late winner for England as the 2018 World Cup semi-finalists overcame Poland 2-1 at Wembley. Harry Kane put England ahead with a first-half penalty after a foul on Raheem Sterling, but a mistake by John Stones allowed Poland to level through Jakub Moder.

England regained the lead with five minutes left when Maguire smashed home after central defensive partner Stones headed a corner back across goal. "It is a big win. We are playing to play at a World Cup," Maguire told ITV. "John (Stones) has been brilliant this year. Defenders make mistakes and when we do we get scrutinised. He made up for it with a great header at the back post." The nervy win means England top Group I with nine points after wins earlier in the international window against San Marino and Albania.



**DUISBURG, Germany:** North Macedonia players celebrate as Germany's forward Timo Werner walks past after the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification match on Wednesday. —AFP

## Wins for Spain and Italy

Goals from Dani Olmo, Ferran Torres and second-half substitute Gerard Moreno lifted Spain to a 3-1 victory over Kosovo and top of Group B. However the qualifier in Seville was overshadowed by a pre-match diplomatic dispute, stemming from the description of Kosovo as a "territory" by the Spanish Football Federa-

tion when it published Spain's group fixtures.

Stefano Sensi scored just after his introduction as a half-time substitute to help Italy, who failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, register a third successive win in Group C. Roberto Mancini's team defeated Lithuania 2-0 in Vilnius with Ciro Immobile adding a stoppage-time penalty for the Azzurri. —AFP

## UEFA 'considering' allowing expanded squads for Euro 2020

**LAUSANNE:** UEFA is weighing up the possibility of allowing teams at this year's European Championship to name larger squads following calls by several coaches who are afraid of losing players to COVID-19, a spokesperson told AFP yesterday. "UEFA is considering the issue. No decision has been made yet," a spokesperson for European football's governing body told AFP.

The option has been prompted by calls from several coaches, notably those of Italy, Belgium and France, to prepare for teams being hit by a raft of positive coronavirus tests which could force players into isolation during the tournament. Euro 2020 was postponed last year because of the pandemic but is due to take place this year at venues all across the continent, from June 11 to July 11.

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez this week called on UEFA to allow teams to name squads of "26 or 27 players". National teams have named squads of 23 players at the World Cup and European Championship ever since the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea. Prior to that only 22 players were allowed in each squad at international tournaments.

"Ideally we would be able to have an extra goalkeeper, defender, midfielder and forward, so either 26 or 27 players in the squad," Martinez said after Belgium beat Belarus 8-0 in a World Cup qualifier. UEFA has already decided that teams will be allowed to make up to five substitutions in games at the Euro instead of the usual three, in line with current rules across many club competitions. —AFP

## Top seed Medvedev follows Osaka out of Miami Open

**MIAMI:** Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev crashed out of the Miami Open Wednesday on a day of upsets that also saw Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka ousted from the quarterfinals. Seventh-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut beat Medvedev 6-4, 6-2, for his third win in as many meetings with the Russian who was runner-up to Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open and ascended to No. 2 in the world with his victory at Marseille in March.

Women's world No. 2 Osaka - seeded second behind top-ranked Ashleigh Barty in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament - had bowed out hours earlier, the Japanese star's 23-match winning streak coming to a crashing halt with a 6-0, 6-4 loss to Greece's Maria Sakkari. Bautista booked a semi-final showdown with 19-year-old Italian Jannick Sinner, the world No. 31 who beat Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik 7-6 (7/5), 6-4.

Sakkari will face eighth-seeded Canadian Bianca Andreescu for a place in the women's final. Andreescu, ranked ninth in the world, clawed out a 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 victory over tenacious 58th-ranked Spaniard Sara Sorribes Tormo. Osaka, playing her first tournament since lifting her fourth Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, won just eight points in the first set as she failed to muster a single winner.

Osaka broke in the second game of the second set and seized a 3-0 lead before Sakkari roared back for a victory that ended Osaka's chance of overtaking Australia's Barty - who had already booked her semi-final spot - atop the world rankings this week. Osaka acknowledged that the rankings race may have affected her against Greece's 25th-ranked Sakkari.

"The last time I was in this (press conference) seat, I wasn't really thinking at all about rankings, but someone asked me that question, so then I did start to ponder about it a lot. "So maybe unwillingly that put pressure



**MIAMI GARDENS:** Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain shakes hands after defeating Daniil Medvedev of Russia in their quarterfinal match of the Miami Open at Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

on myself. But I feel like even if it did, I should be able to rise above that," Osaka said.

Osaka hadn't dropped a set at love since her last defeat, which came in February 2020 in a Fed Cup match. "She has the most wins so far this year so she's in great form - it meant a lot to me," said Sakkari, who let loose a scream of delight after the final point. "To be deadly honest, I got a little tight in the first two games of the second set," said Sakkari, who had saved six match points in her fourth-round win over American Jessica Pegula. "I stayed within myself and started fighting back, hitting a few more balls and winning a few points against her."

Andreescu, the 2019 US Open champion trying to work her way back this year after a 15-month injury absence, broke Sorribes in the final game of the opening set, launching a run of eight straight service breaks. Andreescu was irked by a time violation early in the second set, in which Sorribes held serve for the only time in the set for a 5-3 lead - enough of an edge to level the match. —AFP