

## Victorious Italy return home after spoiling England's Euro 2020 party

**ROME:** Italy's team returned home in triumph yesterday after beating England in a tense penalty shootout to win Euro 2020 at Wembley, plunging the host nation into despair and prolonging their 55-year wait for a second major title.

Giorgio Chiellini, the 36-year-old Italy captain, and coach Roberto Mancini lifted the gleaming trophy aloft after the team's plane touched down in Rome just hours after the victory in London on Sunday night.

There was elation among a group who got up early — or never went to bed — to greet the Azzurri as they arrived back in the Italian capital, chanting "We're the champions of Europe!" fronted by Chiellini wearing a crown.

Mancini's men recovered from the shock of conceding the quickest goal ever in a European Championship final to equalize and held their nerve to claim a 3-2 shootout victory after a 1-1 draw following extra-time, sparking scenes of delirium from the players and the small pocket of Italian fans at Wembley.

The three England players — Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka — who missed penalties were subjected to a stream of racial abuse online from their own and other supporters. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson led condemnation of the "appalling abuse", saying: "This England team deserve to be lauded as heroes."

It is the second time Italy have been crowned European champions and marks a remarkable turnaround under Mancini after the team failed to even qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. They were invited to meet with Prime Minister Mario Draghi on Monday evening and also with President Sergio Mattarella, who himself was at Wembley to watch the match.

### Joy in Italy

For England, the failure from the penalty spot extended their dismal record in shoot-outs and left the hosts still desperately waiting for another major trophy after the 1966 World Cup they won on home soil. But in Italy, fans spilled on to the streets from Milan to Palermo to celebrate their side's triumph, pushing aside thoughts of the coronavirus pandemic which has gripped the nation.

"Fantastic," enthused Gabriele Panini in Rome on Sunday night, wearing a wig in the colors of the Italian flag. "Unfortunately we suffered at the beginning but we went our own way, we won!" An overjoyed Mancini said: "The lads were wonderful, I don't know what more to say."

He added: "We did well. We conceded a goal straight away and struggled, but then we dominated the game." A crowd of more than 67,000 mostly England fans at Wembley was whipped into a state of fever pitch by rousing renditions of "Three Lions" and "Sweet Caroline" before kick-off.

England manager Gareth Southgate's team raced out of the blocks and were ahead in just the second minute when defender Luke Shaw finished coolly at the back post after an inviting cross from Kieran Trippier.

Italy grew stronger as the match went on and equalized with 23 minutes remaining when Leonardo Bonucci scrambled the ball into the net from close range. With four minutes remaining of normal time a pitch invader stopped the action and stewards struggled to catch him, adding to a sense of chaos at the stadium after ticketless fans earlier forced their way in.

Extra-time finished goalless despite a flurry of substitutions pushing the game into a shootout drama. Southgate gambled by sending on late substitutes Rashford and Sancho specifically for their



**ROME:** This handout picture taken and released by the Aereoporti Di Roma (A.D.R.) yesterday shows Italian coach Roberto Mancini (left) and Giorgio Chiellini holding the European Championship trophy after Italy won the Euro 2020 final football match between Italy and England, as they arrive at Rome's Fiumicino airport in Rome. —AFP

proveness in taking penalties, but both missed.

"That is my responsibility. I chose the guys to take the kicks. I told the players that nobody is on their own in that situation," said Southgate, who himself missed a penalty in the Euro 96 semi-final against Germany. He said the racial abuse of the players was "unforgivable".

### Fan frenzy

The atmosphere around Wembley was frenzied in the build-up to the match and footage posted on social media showed hundreds of supporters battling to get past lines of stewards and police, with some able to force their way through security cor-

ridons and others scaling walls. Another video appeared to show violent clashes between fans inside Wembley itself. London's Metropolitan Police said it made 49 arrests, and that 19 officers were injured while managing the final.

In Rome, some Italian fans were bleary-eyed Monday after late night carousing, ordering double espressos to revive themselves. "It was a real satisfaction, a great emotion," said Mario Castellini, the manager of a bar in the capital's historic center. Greengrocer Matteo Falovo spoke for many when he said that after 17 months of coronavirus, which hit Italy hard, it had been "a pleasure to be able to think about something else". —AFP



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