

Swiss pip Italy for World Cup ticket as Kane fires England to Qatar



SERRAVALLE: England's forward Harry Kane controls the ball during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group I football match between San Marino and England on Monday at Olympic stadium in Serravalle, San Marino. — AFP

PARIS: European champions Italy missed out on automatic qualification for next year's World Cup after being held to a goalless draw by Northern Ireland in Belfast on Monday, ceding top spot in Group C to Switzerland who beat Bulgaria 4-0.

The Italians needed to match Switzerland's result to qualify directly but while Roberto Mancini's side could only stutter to a stalemate, the Swiss went on the rampage in Lucerne to book their ticket for Qatar. There they will find England, the team the Italians beat in the Euro 2020 final in July, who clinched their qualification with a rampant Harry Kane bagging four goals in 15 minutes in a 10-0 win in San Marino.

"The qualification was earned away in Budapest, in Warsaw, in Albania and I've got to credit all of our players and staff on a really good year," said England manager Gareth Southgate. "The mentality, even in a game like tonight, we can't do anything about the level of the opposition but the way we played was terrific." Germany, Denmark, France, Belgium, Croatia, Spain and Serbia have also qualified directly from Europe.

Italy famously failed in 2018 to qualify for the World Cup after a miserable aggregate defeat to Sweden. "Right now it is what it is, we struggle to score goals, we always have control of the play... It's a shame because the group should have been finished before this match," Mancini told RAI. "I have faith, let's see in March, but we might even win it."

The Italians rarely troubled the home side, only coming to life when news trickled through of Switzer-



BELFAST: Italy's midfielder Jorginho (left) vies with Northern Ireland's midfielder Gavin Whyte during the FIFA World Cup 2022 round one Group C qualification football match between Northern Ireland and Italy at Windsor Park in Belfast, Northern Ireland on Monday. — AFP

land's goal-scoring in Lucerne. Noah Okafor's strike put the Swiss ahead three minutes into the second half and after Xherdan Shaqiri hit the post, Ruben Vargas doubled the score.

The Swiss then had two goals ruled out for offside

but when Cedric Itten headed in for 3-0 after 72 minutes, it meant Italy needed to win by two in Belfast. As the Italians grew more frantic and almost gave away a goal to Conor Washington, who had a shot scrambled off the line, the Swiss nailed the outcome with Remo Freuler making it 4-0 in added time.

Hurry-Kane hits San Marino

England needed just a point from their trip to San Marino, the lowest ranked of FIFA's 210 competing nations. San Marino had lost 36 of their 37 previous home World Cup qualifiers, losing the last 35 in a row by an aggregate score of 146-7. The one non-defeat came in a 0-0 draw with Turkey in 1993.

This time they were unfortunate to come up against a hungry Kane who scored four goals in the space of 15 minutes in the first half. The outcome was never in doubt once Harry Maguire headed in the opener after five minutes.

A Filippo Fabbri own goal made matters worse but that set the stage for Kane. His first came from the penalty spot in the 27th minute and he netted again with a scuffed effort five minutes later. His second penalty in the 39th minute completed his fourth international hat-trick and his second in four days, having also put three past Albania on Friday.

Two minutes later he produced the best of the lot with some neat control inside the box to bag his fourth which took him to 48 goals for England, level with Gary Lineker and behind only Bobby Charlton (49) and Wayne Rooney (53). — AFP



Zhou Guanyu

Alfa Romeo sign 'trailblazer' Zhou, China's first F1 driver

PARIS: Guanyu Zhou will become China's first ever Formula One driver after Alfa Romeo announced yesterday the 22-year-old would drive for the team next season. Zhou has been making waves in Formula Two and replaces Antonio Giovinazzi alongside Valtteri Bottas, who is moving from Mercedes to replace the retiring Kimi Raikkonen.

"To be the first ever Chinese driver in Formula 1 is a breakthrough for Chinese motorsport history," said Zhou. "I know a lot of hopes will be resting on me and, as ever, I will take this as motivation to become better and achieve more."

Alfa Romeo described their new signing as "a trailblazer who will write a pivotal page of his country's motorsport history". Zhou has already had a taste of F1 as a test driver for Alpine and has long been mentioned as making the step up from F2.

"I dreamt from a young age of climbing as high as I can in a sport that I am passionate about and now the dream has come true," Alfa Romeo quoted Zhou, who was educated in Britain, as saying. "It is a privilege for me to start my Formula 1 racing career with an iconic team, a team that has introduced so much young talent into Formula 1 in the past. Now the dream is reality."

Zhou has enjoyed a breakthrough year in F2, and is lying second and challenging for the title with races in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi to come. Alfa Romeo team principal Frederic Vasseur said he believed Zhou would establish "a very successful partnership with Valtteri". As well as the arrival of "a very talented driver" Vasseur welcomed "all the new Chinese fans who will join the team". — AFP

49ers pound hapless Rams in NFL upset

SAN FRANCISCO: Wide receiver Deebo Samuel scored two touchdowns as the San Francisco 49ers grabbed their first home victory in more than a year with a 31-10 upset of the Los Angeles Rams on Monday.

Samuel rushed for an eight-yard touchdown to put the 49ers 21-7 ahead shortly before half-time and then put the seal on San Francisco's victory with a 40-yard touchdown reception late in the fourth quarter. It was the 49ers' first win at home in 13 months, a winless streak at Levi's Stadium that stretched back to October last year.

The Rams headed into Monday's game with hopes of closing the gap on NFC West leaders Arizona after the Cardinals' shock loss to Carolina on Sunday.



SANTA CLARA: Deebo Samuel #19 of the San Francisco 49ers runs for a touchdown in the second half in the game against the Los Angeles Rams at Levi's Stadium on Monday in Santa Clara, California. — AFP

But the Rams' vaunted offense, which handed a debut to new receiver Odell Beckham Jr, was roughed up by a rampant 49ers defense, with defensive end Nick Bosa superb throughout. Bosa sacked Rams quarterback

Matthew Stafford once and finished with two more hits as the Los Angeles offense never got going. The Rams receiving corps also had a poor night, with Cooper Kupp and Tyler Higbee both dropping straightforward catches at key moments.

San Francisco quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo finished with 182 passing yards including two touchdowns with no interceptions. Running back Elijah Mitchell had 91 yards from 27 carries while Samuel had 36 rushing yards and 97 receiving yards. Rams quarterback Stafford meanwhile had 243 yards with one touchdown and two interceptions on a torrid night for the Los Angeles offense. Newly acquired receiver Beckham had an overwhelming debut with just 18 yards from two receptions.

San Francisco led from start to finish, taking control with touchdowns from George Kittle and a 27-yard interception return by Jimmie Ward to make it 14-0 at the end of the first quarter. The Rams responded with a Higbee touchdown, but Samuel's first touchdown of the night left San Francisco 21-7 up at half-time. — AFP