

Scotland down Spain 2-0

De Bruyne steers 'merciless' Belgium past Germany



GLASGOW: Scotland's midfielder Scott McTominay (center right) clears the ball from the path of Spain's striker Borja Iglesias during the UEFA Euro 2024 group A qualification football match between Scotland and Spain on March 28, 2023. — AFP

PARIS: Scott McTominay scored twice as Scotland claimed a famous 2-0 victory over Spain at Hampden Park in Euro 2024 qualifying on Tuesday, while Croatia won in Turkey. Steve Clarke's Scotland won their opening match in Group A 3-0 against Cyprus on Saturday but usurped that result with a stunning performance against three-time European champions Spain. It was their first victory over Spain since 1984 and probably their best result since beating France in 2007.

"The manager said before getting on the bus for the stadium: 'This is your chance to create a legacy as a Scotland player,'" said McTominay. "These are the sort of nights in 20-30 years you remember as a player. When you watch back the game you say I was there. It's what the game is about." Manchester United midfielder McTominay gave the hosts a dream start by slotting home Andrew Robertson's cutback in the seventh minute.

Ryan Christie went close to a second before Jose-lu, who scored twice on his debut against Norway at the weekend, hit the crossbar for Spain. Lyndon Dykes missed a golden chance to double the Scots' advantage in first-half added time, but dinked the ball over the bar after racing through on goal. McTominay made no such mistake six minutes after the restart, though, drilling home a fine left-footed volley after excellent work from Kieran Tierney.

Spain piled on late pressure but failed to create many

clear-cut chances as Scotland held on to the delight of a raucous crowd in Glasgow. The loss is a serious early setback for new Spain coach Luis de la Fuente who took over from Luis Enrique following a World Cup last-16 exit to Morocco. "It's clear that the two chances they had they put away and we tried, we hit the woodwork twice, we had a lot of chances, above all in the first half," Spain midfielder Rodri told Teledeporte. "We have to improve these lapses, and these things that cost us against these teams."

Scotland are top of a difficult Group A that also includes Erling Haaland's Norway and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's Georgia. The Georgians played out a 1-1 draw with Norway in the other Group A game in Batumi. The Scandinavians took the lead through Alexander Sorloth, playing in place of the injured Haaland, in the 15th minute. But Metz forward Georges Mikautadze equalized on the hour mark to ensure Georgia did not start their bid to qualify for a first major tournament with a defeat. "It would have been worse if we had stood here and not created chances. We had some incredible chances today. That's life," said Norway coach Stale Solbakken.

Croatia beat Turkey

World Cup semi-finalists Croatia eased to an impressive 2-0 win in Turkey to kickstart their Group D campaign after an opening draw with Wales. Chelsea midfielder Mateo Kovacic netted a first-half double

with both goals coming from Mario Pasalic assists. Croatia are level on four points with Wales after Rob Page's side beat Latvia 1-0 for their first win since the retirement of Gareth Bale.

Striker Kieffer Moore headed home the winning goal for a dominant Wales in the 41st minute. Switzerland made it two wins from two games in Group I with a comfortable 3-0 success against Israel. Goals from Ruben Vargas, Zeki Amdouni and Silvan Widmer helped the Swiss follow up a 5-0 thrashing of Belarus in style. Romania also boast a 100 percent record in the group after edging out Belarus 2-1, while Kosovo have two points from as many matches after a 1-1 draw with Andorra.

'Merciless' Belgium

A goal and two assists from Kevin De Bruyne lifted Belgium past struggling Euro 2024 hosts Germany, winning 3-2 in a friendly in Cologne on Tuesday. De Bruyne set up two goals to give his side a 2-0 lead inside 10 minutes, before scoring one of his own late in the second to deepen Germany's woes ahead of next year's European Championship on home soil. "Independent of the result, it is important how we perform in these friendly games," said new Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco. "It's not easy to play here... the German team have some really good players."

Germany were hoping to find some form after recent uncharacteristic early exits from major tournaments, but lost to Belgium for the first time since 1954.

"We were too restrained, too passive, and we weren't able to put the opponent under pressure," Germany coach Hansi Flick told TV network RTL, saying "Belgium played mercilessly". The four-time world champions suffered a second successive World Cup group-stage exit in Qatar last year, which followed a last-16 loss to England at Euro 2020.

Belgium's German-raised coach Tedesco pushed Yannick Carrasco up front in place of Arsenal's Leandro Trossard and the move paid immediate dividends, with the Atletico Madrid winger blasting in on the counter just six minutes in. Romelu Lukaku, scorer of all three goals in Belgium's 3-0 romp against Sweden in Euro qualifying on Friday, then smashed in a left-footed effort to double the lead, the goal again assisted by De Bruyne. With three first-choice central defenders out, a rattled Germany looked all but certain to concede a third.

The introduction of Emre Can, who replaced the injured Leon Goretzka midway through the first half, brought the home side some desperately needed stability. Germany were on the board soon after when Niclas Füllkrug converted a penalty awarded for a Luka-lu handball, giving the late-blooming Werder Bremen striker his sixth goal in six international appearances. Belgium's incisiveness eluded them in the second half as Germany pushed for an equalizer but they were unable to break through, coming closest when Timo Werner had a goal chalked off for offside. — AFP



Kuwait grabs IHF bronze

KUWAIT: Deputy Director-General of Public Authority for Sport (PAS), Bashar Abdullah, said bronze medal won by the Kuwaiti team at the 2023 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Championship, Division IV, in Mongolia, is a great achievement in the history of the game in Kuwait. The well-deserved victory, given the fierce competition, is the fruit of relentless efforts by Kuwait Winter Games Club to promote the game over the past years. Abdullah told reporters on Tuesday after

receiving the champions of the Blue team. He congratulated the players and the technical and managing mission to the championship, which ended two days ago, on their first achievement on the global level. On his part, President of Kuwait Winter Games Club Fheid Al-Ajmy voiced joy for the historic victory, noting that the Kuwaiti player Al-Al-Sarraf won the best forward award.

Al-Ajmy dedicated the victory to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He extolled Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdurrahman Al-Mutairi and all sports officials for their support to the Club. — KUNA

Messi scores 100th Argentina's goal

SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO: Argentina captain Lionel Messi on Tuesday scored his 100th international goal for the reigning world champions as they romped to a 7-0 friendly win over outclassed Curacao. Seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi opened the scoring against the Caribbean island minnows on 20 minutes in Santiago del Estero. It came 17 years after he opened his Argentina account in a 3-2 defeat to Croatia in March 2006.

The 35-year-old soon added another just after the half-hour mark to make it 3-0, and then completed his hat-trick on 37 minutes with the fifth as Argentina toyed with their overmatched opponents. It was his seventh hat-trick for the national team. "You cannot describe Messi in words," said fellow goalscorer Nicolas Gonzalez. "He's the best in the world and he shows it match after match, day after day. Every time he touches the ball, he makes you smile."

Messi came into the game not just as his country's all-time record goalscorer, but with more goals than the next two top marksmen—Gabriel Batistuta on 56 and Sergio Aguero with 41 - put together. This was Argentina's second match since winning the World Cup in dramatic style against France in Qatar in December—triumphing 4-2 on penalties after a thrilling 3-3 draw—and it was always going to be about Messi reaching 100 goals. Now with 102, he remains third in the all-time list, behind great rival Cristiano Ronaldo (122) of Portugal and Iran's Ali Daei (109).

Messi had come up short on Thursday last week when he notched his 99th goal for the Albiceleste as Argentina toiled in their homecoming celebration match



SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (center) raises a replica of the World Cup trophy next to his teammates during a recognition ceremony for the World Cup-winning players, following the friendly football match between Argentina and Curacao on March 28, 2023. — AFP

against Panama. The Central Americans had held out until the 78th minute before 21-year-old MLS sensation Thiago Almada broke their resistance. Messi then scored direct from a free-kick a minute from time—his 800th goal in professional football—in front of 83,000 delirious fans in Buenos Aires.

Curacao, ranked 86th by world governing body FIFA, could only hold out for 20 minutes before Messi took a pass from Giovanni Lo Ceslo, cut inside his marker onto his weaker right foot and fired a low shot into the bottom corner. The referee was then seen on live television throwing the ball to someone on the side of the pitch as DirecTV commentators speculated that it was heading "straight to the museum." Three minutes later Gonzalez outjumped goalkeeper Eloy Room to head home from four yards. — AFP