

Germany stun France in friendly

AP ■ DORTMUND

Veteran forward Thomas Mueller kick-started Germany's post-Hansi Flick era, scoring early to set the Euro 2024 hosts on the way to a 2-1 friendly win over France in Dortmund on Tuesday.

Flick's sacking on Sunday triggered Rudi Voeller's return to the dugout for the first time since 2005.

The interim coach brought Mueller back into the starting line-up and the move paid off early, Mueller scoring four minutes in.

Mueller's Bayern team-mate Leroy Sane scored with three minutes remaining to double his side's lead.

Sane gave away a penalty just a minute later. France captain Antoine Griezmann converted but Germany held on for a 2-1 win — just their second victory in seven games since the Qatar World Cup.

"Our early goal was good for us," Muller said at the final whistle.

"We knew we'd have a lot to do. It wasn't easy for us with this bad run, and the departure of Hansi Flick at the end of the week was a crazy situation."

Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen was relieved.

"It was balm for the soul. It was a curious and difficult few days, so it's all the nicer that we were able to end it with a win," he said. "That was what we needed."

Fresh from Thursday's 2-0 Euro qualifier victory over Ireland, France's fifth straight win since losing the 2022 World Cup final on penalties to Argentina, coach Didier Deschamps made six changes



including benching star striker Kylian Mbappe.

Deschamps' counterpart and old friend Voeller — the two won the Champions League with Marseille in 1993 — made just three changes to Flick's final line-up, including returning Mueller to centre-forward for the first time since Qatar.

The home crowd at Borussia Dortmund's Signal Iduna Park rallied behind their embattled side.

The fans did not need to wait long to celebrate, Mueller rewarding Voeller's faith by opening the scoring four minutes in, chesting down a spinning Benjamin Henrichs cross

and blasting in from close range.

Mueller's first Germany goal since June 2022 lifted his confidence perhaps a little too much. The Bayern forward tried a mid-air backheel from a Florian Wirtz cross but scuffed the ball wide.

Germany were energised and direct. Even an injury to

captain Ilkay Gundogan midway through the first half failed to take the wind out of their sails. Gundogan was replaced by 32-year-old debutant Pascal Gross.

'LONG WAY TO GO'

Slotting in alongside the impressive Emre Can in midfield, Gross showed no signs of

nerves, barking instructions at his teammates as he sought to direct Germany's attack.

With nothing but pride at stake, France were in cruise control throughout, their best chance falling to Randal Kolo Muani midway through the second half.

With German goalie ter Stegen on the floor having kept out a fierce effort from Aurelien Tchouameni, Kolo Muani, who left the Bundesliga for Paris Saint-Germain at the start of the month, slipped with an open goal begging.

With three minutes to go, Sane ran onto a perfect through ball from Kai Havertz, and slotted in his second goal in two games. Sane quickly turned villain, bringing down Eduardo Camavinga just one minute later.

Griezmann converted the penalty for a fifth goal in Germany-France fixtures, the most of any player. "I wouldn't say we lacked desire, but we weren't as effective as usual, and at this level that comes at a price," said Tchouameni.

"Overall, I don't think we played a bad game. We knew they were a team in trouble, and they got into the game very well, while we were a little less effective."

"It's never a pleasure to lose, but that's the game after all."

Germany's last win over France was a 1-0 victory in the quarter finals of the 2014 World Cup, they have failed to win any of their last six meetings.

"It's great to win against France," said Mueller. "It was fun, but we didn't need to overstate it. We still have a long way to go, but it was a small burst of emotional liberation."



England beat Scotland

AP ■ GLASGOW

Jude Bellingham stole the show with a goal and assist as England extended their 24-year unbeaten run against Scotland in a 3-1 friendly win to mark the 150th anniversary of the first meeting between the nations.

Phil Foden and Harry Kane were also on target as the Three Lions tamed the roar of Hampden Park and Scotland's five-game winning streak on Tuesday. The hosts had high hopes of a famous victory in football's oldest international fixture after impressive wins over Spain and Erling Haaland's Norway in recent months to close in on qualifying for Euro 2024.

But Scotland suffered a sobering evening as England proved a class apart.

Bellingham was the pick of Gareth Southgate's stars as the Real Madrid midfielder revelled in the number 10 role he has shone in for the Spanish giants in the early weeks of the season.

"It's just a freedom role really," said Bellingham. "I know it depends on the system we play and we've got so many amazing players to accommodate."

"The team comes first always. I really enjoyed playing in that position today."

Southgate hailed the 116th clash between the sides as the renewal of a "great sporting rivalry" on the eve of the game.

However, the ugly side of the animosity between the two sets of supporters was on show even before a ball was kicked.

After the English national anthem was drowned out by a chorus of booing, a minute's silence for former Scotland manager Craig Brown was disrupted by the away fans.

Once the action got underway Scotland were second best, even if it took England over half an hour to make their dominance show in the scoreline.

"We knew playing against England was going to be difficult but if you want to learn as a team, you have to play against the best teams," said Scotland boss Steve Clarke.

"We didn't want to lose to our old enemy, but sometimes in football you have to take your medicine."

Argentina triumph without Messi

AP ■ MONTEVIDEO

World champions Argentina rested Lionel Messi but still shined in a 3-0 victory over 10-man Bolivia in La Paz on Tuesday to maintain their winning start to South American World Cup qualifying.

Brazil also have the maximum six points from two games after a superb 90th-minute winner from Marquinhos against Peru in Lima for the only goal of the match.

But Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay suffered a setback, giving up the lead to end with a 2-1 defeat at Ecuador.

Messi, who has had a hectic schedule with his club Inter Miami, watched his teammates from the bench but was not listed as a substitute, having complained of tiredness after scoring the winner in Thursday's 1-0 victory over Ecuador.

Despite the absence of their talisman Lionel Scaloni's side had too much firepower for Bolivia with goals from Enzo Fernandez, Nicolas Tagliafico and Nicolas Gonzalez securing an impressive victory.

The lively Julian Alvarez had a hand in Argentina's opener in the 31st minute, feeding Angel Di Maria, whose low cross was turned in by Fernandez, who had made a perfectly timed run into the box.

Argentina went in at the break with a 2-0 lead after Tagliafico met a floated Di Maria free-kick with a header that looped over Viscarra.

The three-time World Cup



winners were in total control after the break with Alvarez hitting the post in the 70th minute and Viscarra kept busy by efforts from Rodrigo De Paul and Di Maria. Gonzalez wrapped up the victory seven minutes from the end with a left-footed drive after more hesitant defending from the home side, who have lost both their opening games.

Scaloni was pleased with the performance by his team, saying they were "not afraid of playing the ball" and also offered an explanation for Messi's absence.

"Leo was not ready to play, he tried to recover, but he did not feel comfortable," he said.

Brazil came up against a determined Peru side and looked set to be frustrated when Raphinha's rocket in the 72nd minute was brilliantly saved by Pedro Gallese.

But in the final minute Neymar whipped in a corner and Marquinhos met it with a masterful glancing header that flashed into the far corner.

Colombia had to settle for a point in a disappointing goalless draw in Santiago, Chile.

After an impressive start to his reign in charge of Uruguay, Argentine Bielsa saw his team lose to two goals from Ecuador defender Felix Torres in Quito.

Uruguay took the lead in the 38th minute through Agustin Canobbio but the home side levelled just before the break when Torres rose to power home a header from a Moises Caicedo cross.

A penalty award gave Ecuador the opportunity to take the lead after the break but Enner Valencia's woeful effort from the spot flew wide.

But Torres showed his value again to grab the winner, sliding into a crowded box to turn in a low cross from 16-year-old Kendry Paez. Venezuela defeated Paraguay 1-0 at home thanks to Salomon Rondon's injury-time penalty to raise hopes of making the World Cup for the first time in their history. The hosts thought they had the lead in the 78th minute when Yangel Herrera fired home, but the referee's view at the monitor concluded that the midfielder had handled the ball — to the fury of the home crowd.

But the technology worked in Venezuela's favor in stoppage time when it spotted that Paraguayan defender Ivan Piris had handled during an aerial challenge in the box and Rondon confidently tucked away the spot-kick.

Man Utd announce new shirt deal with Qualcomm

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United have announced a bumper sponsorship deal with US-based Qualcomm Technologies, whose Snapdragon brand will replace the TeamViewer logo on their shirts from next season. The Premier League club, who did not reveal the financial details of the deal, were reportedly targeting an agreement worth £60 million (\$75 million) per year. It is understood the figure equals or even surpasses the previous biggest shirt deal in football history. Qualcomm has been one of United's global partners since last year.

"Manchester United plc has agreed to an expanded strategic collaboration with Qualcomm Technologies, Inc, that will see the Snapdragon brand displayed on the front of the club's famous shirt," the club said in a statement confirming the agreement. It added: "Under the expanded agreement, Snapdragon will become Manchester United's front of shirt partner from the start of the 2024/25 season, featuring on the home, away and third kits of the men's and women's teams." United have not won the Premier League since 2013. Erik ten Hag's team have won just two of their first four league matches this season, with fans voicing their frustration at unpopular owners the Glazers.

Rubiales insists Hermoso kiss was 'mutual' and 'consented'

AP ■ MADRID

Former Spanish football federation president Luis Rubiales continued to insist his kiss on Jenni Hermoso's lips after the Women's World Cup final was "a mutual act", in an interview broadcast on Tuesday in the United Kingdom. World Cup-winning Spain midfielder Hermoso, 33, says the kiss was not consensual and a Spanish judge has summoned Rubiales to appear in court on Friday in a sexual assault investigation. Rubiales, who stood down from his post on Sunday, three weeks after the incident during the final medal ceremony following Spain's Sydney triumph, maintains his version is the "truth".

"What we had is a spontaneous act, a mutual act, an act that both consented to, which was driven by the emotion of the moment, the happiness, so I maintain that that is the truth of what happened," Rubiales told TalkTV show Piers Morgan Uncensored. The 46-year-old described the kiss as "non-sexual", having previously compared his behaviour to how he would act with his daughters.

"My intentions were noble, enthusiastic, 100 percent non-sexual, 100 percent, I repeat, 100 percent," said Rubiales.

The former federation chief, who was provisionally suspended by FIFA before he resigned, said the kiss occurred in a moment of jubilation.



"You can imagine if you win the lottery or hopefully soon one day the war in the Ukraine finishes, I mean celebrations will go on up and down the globe," said Rubiales. "People don't ask permissions, it's just a happy, happy time and people celebrate."

However Rubiales reiterated that he had asked permission for the kiss, which he described as "a peck", and accepted that as president of the federation, the act was wrong. "Of course, I have said it from the beginning, I made a mistake, and I apologised in a sincere manner," he said. "A president can give a hug, but needs to act in a more diplomatic and colder way."

Olmo, Orban to miss several weeks with injury

AP ■ LEIPZIG

RB Leipzig will have to do without forward Dani Olmo and captain Willi Orban for several weeks after both players picked up knee injuries on international duty, the Bundesliga club confirmed on Tuesday. Spain forward Olmo will miss "a few games" while Hungary defender Orban "will be out for ten weeks", the German Cup winners tweeted.

Olmo returned from Spain duty earlier in the week and underwent tests to diagnose the injury to his right knee.

The forward, who extended his deal at the club until 2027 in June, has been in stellar form for Leipzig this season, scoring five goals and assisting once in four competitive games.

Orban also injured his right knee. Leipzig host Augsburg this Saturday, before travelling to face Swiss side Young Boys Bern next Tuesday in the Champions League.

Olympic qualification tough but retirement is not on mind: Saina

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saina Nehwal is aware that qualifying for the Paris Olympics will be 'tough' for her but the injury-ravaged Indian shuttler has no plans to quit badminton and would do everything under the sun to resurrect her career. Laid low by a spate of injuries, including a recurring knee issue, and other health problems, the 33-year-old from Hyderabad has found it tough to stay fit to consistently turn up at the BWF World Tour events.

Her ranking has plummeted to number 55 in the world.

"I get inflammation in my knee whenever I train for an hour or two. I am not able to bend my knee so a second session of training is not possible. The doctors have given me a couple of injections. Of course the Olympics is near and it is tough (to qualify)," Saina told reporters.

"But I am trying my level best to comeback. The physios

are helping me but if the inflammation doesn't reduce, it will take little more time to recover. I also don't want to play half-heartedly and results will also not come.

"If you are trying to compete against An Seyoung, or Tai Tzu Ying or Akane (Yamaguchi), it won't happen with just one hour of training. The level has improved so much. So when you are playing such high level players, you need a high level game," Saina said.

The former world number 1 last played at the Singapore Open in June this year. It was her sixth tournament of the season. She managed just one quarter-final finish in 14 events in 2022, while a semifinal finish at Orleans Masters was her best performance in 8 events in 2021.

"If you are thinking about the knee showing inflammation after a training, then in tournament also if it shows up after one round, then it will be a negative

sign. "I am trying to sort out that first. Playing is easy, to maintain the body, to not have any niggles is what is important. Hopefully with the guidance of physios and Dr Dinshaw Pardiwala, let's see how I recover and comeback. It all depends on practice."

The two-time world championships medallist Saina last won a title in January 2019 at the Malaysia Masters.

While knee has been a recurring issue, she also had problems with groin and ankle, besides being diagnosed with acute gastroenteritis with mild pancreatitis in the past.

Asked about retirement, Saina said: "Woh toh sab ko karna padta hai (everyone has to retire someday)... There is no deadline. Everyone is going to stop when you feel the body is not supporting you."

"But at the moment I am trying. As a sports person, it is my duty to try because I love the game and I have been playing for so many years."



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