

## Sports

# Sterling downs Czechs as France sweep past Moldova

## Griezmann shines for France with a comfortable 4-1 victory

**PARIS:** Raheem Sterling showed that he is coming of age on the international stage as his hat-trick saw England start their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign by hammering the Czech Republic 5-0, while Antoine Griezmann inspired France to a battering of Moldova.

Manchester City attacker Sterling had scored just two goals in his first 45 caps, but he now has five in his last three international appearances following Friday's treble, which helped England storm to the top of Group A ahead of Monday's trip to Montenegro, who drew 1-1 at Bulgaria.

Sterling opened the scoring in the 24th minute when he tapped home Jadon Sancho's cross, and struck twice more in the second half to put the result beyond doubt after Harry Kane fired home his 21st England goal from the penalty spot.

"It was a beautiful team performance and I was happy to help the team get the win," Sterling said. Sterling has 24 goals for club and country this term and his impressive form is a cry from the dark days when he was vilified as England crashed out of Euro 2016. "I'm just being confident in myself, I'm trying to get in areas and take shots, not to worry about anything," he added. England carried the momentum from a run to the World Cup semi-finals and qualification for the last four of the Nations League into the Euro qualifiers and blooded young hopeful Sancho, who impressed on his full England debut.

The 18-year-old who has shone in the Bundesliga for Borussia Dortmund, gave England fans further cause for excitement, with his potential adding to that of Sterling and Kane coming into their prime.

"I thought Raheem was electric. He has looked like that all week in training. I'm pleased for him, it is a special night for him," coach Gareth Southgate said. "I think he's really matured as a person and a footballer.

He's hungry for goals and hitting things instinctively without thinking too much."

France also got off to a perfect start after an older head in Antoine Griezmann spurred the world champions on to a comfortable 4-1 victory at Moldova. Griezmann opened the scoring with his 27th France goal in the 24th minute of their Group H encounter before crossing for Raphael Varane to double the scores three minutes later.

Olivier Giroud equalled David Trezeguet as Les Bleus' third highest scorer of all time with his 34th international goal nine minutes before the break and Kylian Mbappe completed the rout with three minutes left, before Vladimir Ambros claimed a late consolation for Moldova.

Griezmann would have had two more assists had Giroud and Paul Pogba been more clinical in front of goal, but France's display was easily enough for the three points and top spot in the group ahead of Iceland and Turkey, 2-0 winners against Albania and Andorra respectively.

"We played a very consummate first half in terms of control and attacking organisation. The second half was less fulfilling due to substitutions," said coach Didier Deschamps. "We've opened our campaign well and the second game comes around quickly. In three days we have to do it again."

Cristiano Ronaldo drew a blank on his return to international football after nine months away, as Ukraine battled to a goalless draw in Lisbon. The draw was the first time Santos' side have failed to score at home in 19 matches and leaves them second in the group behind Luxembourg, who beat Lithuania 2-1.

William Carvalho had a fine header ruled out for offside in the 16th minute and Ronaldo, Pepe and Andre Silva all went close to opening the scoring, but



**LONDON:** England's midfielder Raheem Sterling (2nd R) shoots to score his third goal, their fourth during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group A qualification football match between England and Czech Republic at Wembley Stadium in London on Friday. — AFP

Ukraine stopper Andriy Pyatov was on fine form to deny them.

In the end the away side could have snatched the three points through Junior Moraes, only for the debutant to fluff a golden chance to grab a shock win.

"We didn't play as we wanted to. We started slowly, not pressing the way we wanted," said Manchester City midfielder Bernardo Silva. "The second half we tried to create chances to go after the game but unfortunately we didn't score." — AFP

## Messi injured on return as Argentina lose to Venezuela

**MADRID:** Lionel Messi returned to Argentina duty for the first time since the World Cup on Friday but it was a disappointing outing for the forward as they lost 3-1 to Venezuela and he was ruled out of their next match with a groin problem.

Messi showed flashes of brilliance but it was not his night as Venezuela put three past their more illustrious rivals for the first time with goals from Salomon

Rondon, Jhon Murillo and Josef Martinez. Lautaro Martinez got Argentina's consolation.

Messi finished the match but felt some pain in his groin and will sit out Tuesday's friendly against Morocco in Tangier, the Argentine Football Association said after the game.

The injury, described as a flare up of an existing problem, was not thought to be serious. Midfielder Gonzalo Martinez will also miss the Morocco match with a thigh strain.

Messi took a sabbatical after his country's last-16 exit from the 2018 finals in Russia but he returned with a clean shaven new look to captain the side in the all-South American affair at Atletico Madrid's Metropolitano stadium.

Venezuela had only beaten Argentina once in 23 previous encounters, but they got the perfect start after five minutes when Rondon brought down a long pass

inside the box and crashed a shot past keeper Franco Armani. Rondon should have made it two with a header in the 40th but the second goal was only moments away as Murillo took advantage of a quick free kick to scamper to the edge of the box and curl a lovely right-foot shot into the far corner of the net.

Lautaro Martinez finished off a superb counter attack to pull Argentina back into the game after 59 minutes but their hopes were short lived and Venezuela's Josef Martinez made it 3-1 from the penalty spot with a quarter of an hour remaining.

"In the first half we created chances but they scored twice when we made mistakes," said Lautaro Martinez. "In the second half we did well and moved the ball about but they got that penalty. We need to keep improving." Argentina face Morocco in Tangier on Tuesday, while Venezuela's next face Catalonia in Girona tomorrow. — Reuters

## New-look Germany face first big test against Holland

**BERLIN:** Marco Reus has called on Germany to win back the trust of their fans when they launch their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign against old rivals the Netherlands today. Germany were booed by fans in Wolfsburg during their 1-1 friendly draw against Serbia last Wednesday, and Reus has said that it is up to the players to change the mood.

"We need patience from the fans, but it is our job to make sure the atmosphere improves," he said on Friday. Germany have not won a competitive game since they beat Sweden at the World Cup last summer. They crashed out of the World Cup shortly after that game, and were relegated from the top tier of the UEFA Nations League in the autumn.

Coach Joachim Loew declared the beginning of a "new era" last week, having brought in several young players and made the controversial call to drop three experienced stars in Thomas Mueller, Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng.

Yet Reus warned that the new-look Germany would take time to reach their full potential. "We are all ambitious enough to want to win every game, but it won't just start working from one day to the next," he said.

The change of personnel means that Reus, 29, is among the most senior players in the team. "I am at an age where I have to take on leadership roles, both here and at my club," said the Borussia Dortmund star. "Everything will take time, we have a lot of young players who need to find their feet."

Reus is expected to return to the starting lineup, along with Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos today in Amsterdam. He warned that the Netherlands were a step ahead of Germany at the moment.

"They have a lot of quality. They have lots of good youngsters, but also a few older players. They have a good mix at the moment, and that is what we are aiming for as well." The Dutch cruised to a 4-0 win over Belarus in their opening qualifier on Thursday.

Oranje captain Virgil van Dijk was on the score-sheet with a header, and Germany's Niklas Sule has identified the Liverpool defender as a threat. "We can't allow him space to run onto headers," said Sule, who watched van Dijk do just that when Liverpool knocked Bayern out of the Champions League earlier this month.

Van Dijk has made a habit of scoring against German sides. He hit a late equaliser for the Netherlands against Germany when the two sides met in Gelsenkirchen last November. He also scored in a 3-0 win over Germany a month earlier.

Those results have rekindled the old rivalry between the Dutch and the Germans. On Sunday, Germany will be hoping to get the fans back onside with a win over their neighbours. "It is always a special game, partly because of how close we are geographically," said Germany and Bayern Munich midfielder Leon Goretzka on Friday.

"As a boy, I used to go on holiday with my family in Holland, and I grew up with the rivalry." "We will be really motivated on Sunday. It's going to be a fiery game." — AFP



Jose Mourinho

## Mourinho targets June return to club management

**LISBON:** Former Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho is targeting a return to club management during the close season in June and has an idea about the type of club he wants to take charge of, the Portuguese has said.

Mourinho has been out of a job since he was sacked by United in December following a dismal run of results that left the club sixth in the Premier League standings, 19 points behind league leaders Liverpool.

"What I have in mind is that I would like to be back in the summer, in June, for a new club, for a new pre-season," Mourinho told BeIN Sports. "I know exactly what I don't want. That's the reason why I had to say (no) already to three or four different offers. And I know what I want, in terms of not a specific club but the nature of the job, the dimension of the job."

Mourinho had said in January that he was not sure if he would manage another club in England after stints with Chelsea and United. The 56-year-old, however, ruled out taking the reins of a national team as he prefers the day-to-day work that comes with being a club manager.

"I don't think so," Mourinho said, when asked if he would take charge of a national team. "I think a national team job is a very specific job. I like daily football, I like daily work, I like many competitions, I like matches and I want to stay in football club level. But who knows?" — Reuters

## Ex-footballer turns gambling own goal into net gain for others

**LONDON:** Scott Davies stood in his kitchen and held a knife to his chest as he contemplated the wreckage of his football career due to an obsession with gambling. Now he makes a career out of warning other players of the perils of betting.

The 31-year-old former Ireland under-21 international, who describes himself as a "pathological gambler", has found salvation and a vocation working for EPIC Risk Management, touring English Football League clubs.

EPIC chief executive Paul Buck was jailed in 2012 after stealing more than £400,000 (\$525,000.) from a client at the bank he worked for to help pay his gambling debts. Davies, who estimates in seven years he lost £300,000, including £60,000 he borrowed from his parents, told AFP he began playing poker when he went on loan to Aldershot from Reading aged 19 as he wanted to feel part of the group.

"Obviously you put three things together-time, money and opportunity. It is a recipe for disaster," he said after appearing on a panel at the Betting on Football conference at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge ground this week.

"When I did have the time I would not use it wisely. The money, I wasted it and any opportunity I had to gamble I gambled." He said the lies that addicts tell eventually prove costly, as happened with him at Reading, where he was playing under then-manager Brendan Rodgers, now boss at Leicester City.

All seemed rosy after the midfielder broke into the first team and played the first four league games of the 2009/10 campaign, and he somehow hid his addiction from Rodgers. "Brendan Rodgers said 'You are younger than the other players in the first team so I think you should stay later and do extra training,'" said Davies.

"I could not do that as I had a date with the roulette machine or at the bookmakers for horse racing so I shot out of training at the earliest opportunity. "It cost me my place as he (Rodgers) took me aside and told me I was dropped after I lied to him about my whereabouts, saying I had a dentist's appointment. Instead I went to the bookies.

"I never played another game for Reading and my career spiralled downhill." Davies said the turning point came on another foray to a bookmaker, when saw his mother standing at the door. "She broke down in the middle of the street and said 'You need to stop gam-



Scott Davies

bling. You are either going to die or break up (your parents') marriage," he said.

"It is like I had a foreigner in my body," said Davies, who would bet on Hungarian handball in the early hours of the morning to keep himself stimulated. "I am now a completely different person to what I was back then. It was almost like the devil had taken me over and forced me to gamble."

Davies, who has a degree in broadcasting and professional writing, regrets wasted opportunities after a career spent playing sporadically at lower-level clubs but said he gets a buzz out of public speaking.

"Some of my mates are playing in the Premier League" he said ruefully. But he said dozens of first-team players have been in contact after he had made visits to clubs. "They will ring when they feel the time is right, when they hit rock bottom." — AFP