

Enrique hails perfect start

AFP | Elche, Spain

Luis Enrique described it as the perfect start after Spain backed up their win over England with a 6-0 demolition of Croatia on Tuesday.

Spain were three up at half-time against the World Cup runners-up thanks to Marco Asensio's two long-range strikes, the second going in off goalkeeper Lovre Kalinic, and an early header from Saul Niguez.

Asensio then laid on three more goals in the second half as Rodrigo Moreno, Sergio Ramos and Isco completed a statement victory in Elche.

Luis Enrique took charge after the humiliating exit to Russia at the World Cup had left Spain doubting the possession game that won them three consecutive major tournaments between 2008 and 2012.

He promised evolution, not revolution, and while his team still dominated possession, they were faster, more direct and less predictable in the final third.

Beating two of the World Cup's semi-finalists in four days leaves Spain top of League A's Group Two in the Nations League.

But, perhaps more importantly, it should also give the players belief in Luis Enrique's methods.

"It would be very easy to say that this is my Spain, generating



Spain players celebrate after Sergio Ramos score their fifth goal against Croatia

many chances and conceding few goals, but the truth is that I am changing things very fast," Luis Enrique said.

"This week everything was perfect."

Asensio was the star of the show but Saul, so impressive against England, shone again,

alongside the talented 23-year-

old Dani Ceballos in midfield.

Spain were barely recognisable from the team that failed to break down Russia in the last 16 but it should also be said they put six past Argentina, under Julen Lopetegui, in March. There is work still to do.

"Comparisons with the World Cup and tonight do not make

sense," Luis Enrique said. "Today we were very effective and everything went wonderfully well. They had an early chance, they didn't take it and then we played brilliantly and scored some great goals."

Croatia's Ivan Santini was guilty of missing early on but once Spain pulled ahead, the



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LUIS ENRIQUE

visitors crumbled.

Luka Modric and Ivan Rakitic, so dominant at the World Cup, never took control while defensively, without Dejan Lovren, the mistakes kept coming.

"We cannot cry about it, we have to improve," coach Zlatko Dalic said.

"What happened has happened, all their chances have gone in and it is better that it happened today than later.

"After the first goal we were not so focused, we tried to do things too fast and started to abandon the system.

"That is not a solution against Spain, who plays well at home, who likes to dominate the ball. After the second goal, the match was over for us."

Monreal in contract talks with Arsenal

AFP | London

Nacho Monreal has opened talks with Arsenal over a new contract with the Premier League club.

Monreal has one year left on his present deal and the Gunners are willing to extend the Spain defender's stay at the Emirates Stadium.

The 32-year-old has made 165 Premier League appearances for Arsenal since joining from Malaga in 2013.

"At the moment we are talking with the club. I've always said I am really happy, I feel very happy playing for Arsenal," he told the London Evening Standard.

"I came six years ago. I have a good relationship with them.

"We are in contact in any moment so don't worry about that. I am happy here. That is the most important thing."

Monreal has been a useful member of an Arsenal defence that new boss Unai Emery hopes to strengthen after their error-strewn displays in the final years of Arsene Wenger's reign.

In the latter stages of his career, Monreal is keen to be a big part of Emery's rebuilding process.

Adams off the mark as USA sink 10-man Mexico

AFP | Nashville, United States

Teenager Tyler Adams scored his first international goal as a new-look United States side defeated 10-man Mexico 1-0 in a friendly international on Tuesday.

New York Red Bulls midfielder Adams burst into the penalty area to tuck away an Antonee Robinson cross on 71 minutes to settle a hardfought encounter at Nissan Stadium in Nashville.

US interim coach Dave Sarachan praised the 19-year-old Adams' performance.

"This kid's a beast," Sarachan said. "When you look at data, analytics and the volume of work he does in 90 minutes, he's a winner, this kid.

"He keeps getting better. Not perfect but he's shown that he's emerging as someone that other players can look up to."

Adams' goal came after tempers had flared during the sec-

ond half of the latest meeting between the two bitter North American football rivals.

Mexico's Angel Zaldivar had been shown a red card in the 66th minute for a brutal challenge on Wil Trapp that saw the USA midfielder lucky to escape serious injury.

Zaldivar's wild tackle had come just moments after several players joined a scuffle triggered by a confrontation between the USA's France-based defender Matt Miazga and Mexican prodigy Diego Lainez.

"We knew that at some point in the game it might boil over," Sarachan said. "And I do think our guys showed great composure."

Lainez, 18, had been Mexico's best player during a dominant first half display which saw El Tri carve out the most promising openings without being able to convert their pressure into goals.



Mexico midfielder Roberto Alvarado (24) dribbles the ball past U.S. midfielders Tim Weah (11) and Weston McKennie (8) during an international friendly match

Liverpool's Keita admits it will take time to be at his best

AFP | London

Liverpool midfielder Naby Keita says it will take time to justify the £52 million (\$63 million) fee the club paid for the Guinea international.

The 23-year-old -- who is expected to start this weekend's match with Tottenham Hotspur despite being left on the bench for Liverpool's previous clash with Leicester City -- told the Liverpool club magazine that having come from the Bundesliga it is only normal that it is taking him time to acclimatise to the Premier League.

Keita was snapped up by Liverpool last year from RB Leipzig but with the condition he remained with the German side until this season.

President George Weah makes football comeback aged 51

AFP | South Africa

Liberia president and former world footballer of the year George Weah made a surprise return to international football Tuesday at the age of 51 in a 2-1 friendly defeat by Nigeria.

The international match in Monrovia was organised to 'retire' the number 14 shirt worn by Weah, who was voted world, European and African footballer of the year in 1995.

Weah, who scored a landslide victory in presidential elections last December, is the only African footballer to win the world and European awards.



Liberia's President George Weah (left) in action



Weah played in Liberia, the Ivory Coast and Cameroon before moving to Europe, where his clubs included Paris Saint-Germain, Monaco, Marseille and AC Milan

Instead of watching the match against Nigeria from the grandstand, he captained his country and showed glimpses of former skills before being substituted 12 minutes from time.

Weah received a standing ovation when leaving the pitch in the capital of a west African country where football is the most popular sport.

Team-mates of Weah wore shirts with "Thank you King George" on them as a tribute to the legend who retired from international football 16 years ago.

Liberia are ranked 47th of 54 African football nations and 158th in the world. The last of

their two Africa Cup of Nations tournament appearances was 16 years ago.

Weah played in Liberia, the Ivory Coast and Cameroon before moving to Europe, where his clubs included Paris Saint-Germain, Monaco, Marseille and AC Milan. He also had brief spells with Chelsea and Manchester City before finishing his career in the United Arab Emirates playing for Al Jazira.

In the friendly match, Nigeria built a two-goal half-time lead thanks to Henry Onyekuru and Simeon Nwankwo and Sherman Kpah converted a late penalty for Liberia.