

Austria see off North Macedonia to secure first ever Euro win



Austria's Michael Gregoritsch (right) steers the ball past North Macedonia's goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski

AFP | Paris

Substitutes Michael Gregoritsch and Marko Arnautovic scored late goals as Austria sealed a 3-1 victory over major tournament debutants North Macedonia in their Group C opener at Euro 2020 on Sunday.

Stefan Lainer put the Austrians ahead early on in Bucharest, but 37-year-old captain Goran Pandev levelled before the half-hour mark to become the second-oldest scorer in Euro history and delight the vocal Macedonian fans.

But Gregoritsch diverted home the deciding goal 12 minutes from time and Arnautovic added a third to ensure Austria claimed their first-ever European Championship win and struck first blood in a group also containing the Netherlands and Ukraine, who meet in Amsterdam later in the day.

Austria next visit the Dutch on Thursday, while North Macedonia stay in the Romanian capital to face Ukraine.

After a bright start by Igor Angelovski's Macedonians on Sunday, Austria struck against the run of play in the 18th minute as right-back Lainer met Marcel Sabitzer's cross at the back post to volley past goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski.

Lainer celebrated by holding up a shirt with the words "Eriksen stay strong" after Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest in their game against Finland on Saturday.



Michael Gregoritsch sent a message to Christian Eriksen after scoring, holding up a shirt which read "Eriksen stay strong"

It was the first time Austria had taken the lead in a European Championship game.

They quickly threatened a second goal as Sasa Kalajdzic turned Sabitzer's pass too close to Dimitrievski.

But North Macedonia continued to press and levelled in the 28th minute as Austria goalkeeper Daniel Bachmann lost the ball as he slid out to collect it after some comical defending, and Pandev gleefully accepted the gift to slot into an empty net.

It was a record-extending 38th goal for the former Inter Milan forward for his country, making him the second-oldest player to net in the tournament after Austrian Ivica Vastic at the age of 38 against Poland in 2008.

England make winning start at Euro 2020

England up and running at Euro 2020 as Raheem Sterling's strike sinks Croatia

● Raheem Sterling scored the only goal as England deservedly beat Croatia in a tight game at a sweltering Wembley

AFP | London

Raheem Sterling ignited England's Euro 2020 campaign as the Manchester City forward's clinical finish sealed a 1-0 win against Croatia in their Group D opener yesterday.

Gareth Southgate's side were struggling to break down Croatia until Sterling struck in the second half at sun-baked Wembley.

The 26-year-old's first goal at a major tournament -- in his 13th game -- was the perfect riposte to critics who questioned Southgate's decision to select him instead of Jack Grealish.

Sterling has endured a chequered relationship with England fans after being hounded following his tame performances at Euro 2016.

He also struggled to hold down a place with Premier League champions City this term, culminating in his lacklustre display in their Champions League final defeat against Chelsea.

But, days after he was given an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his anti-racism campaigning, Sterling enjoyed a perfectly-timed moment of redemption.

In a rematch of the 2018 World Cup semi-final won by Croatia, England were hampered by a lack of cutting edge until Sterling came to the rescue.

Sterling's winner eased the



England's Raheem Sterling scores and celebrates during the match against Croatia

tension at Wembley and got fans bellowing 'Football's coming home' in the hope England can emulate their run to the semi-finals when they hosted Euro 96, and maybe even win a major tournament for the first time since the 1966 World Cup.

In truth, this was a far from convincing performance, but Southgate will take heart from the way his team kept their nerve on a pressure-packed occasion.

England host neighbours Scotland in their second Group D match on Friday before taking on the Czech Republic in their final game of the first stage on June 22.

After England were booed for taking the knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement before their friendlies against Austria and Romania in Middlesbrough, there were fears fans at Wembley would turn on the team as well.

There were a smattering of boos from sections of the 22,500 crowd, but the majority cheered the gesture this time.

It was Southgate's surprise decision to select Calvin Phillips

that attracted most pre-match attention.

But it proved an inspired move as, along with Sterling, the Leeds midfielder was England's most accomplished performer.

England hold firm

Manchester City forward Phil Foden, his hair bleached blond, has drawn comparisons with England legend Paul Gascoigne, who sported the same eye-catching hair cut during Euro 96.

Foden was inches away from giving England the perfect start in the sixth minute with the kind of magic that made Gascoigne so beloved.

Collecting Sterling's pass on the edge of the area, Foden worked space to curl his left-footed shot off the far post.

Phillips was quickly into his stride and forced Dominik Livakovic to make a scrambling save with his strike from the edge of the area.

But Southgate's men showed signs of running out of ideas after their early flurry failed to yield a goal.

Southgate had picked Foden,



Sterling and Mason Mount as the creative forces behind Harry Kane.

With that quartet still struggling to unhinge Croatia into the second half, fans began chanting for the introduction of Aston Villa playmaker Grealish.

But Sterling quelled the mounting anxiety as England struck in the 57th minute.

Phillips was the catalyst as he burst forward past two Croatians and slipped a deft pass behind the defensive line.

Sterling arrived just ahead of his lunging marker and slotted a low shot past Livakovic from 10 yards.

Kane was denied in painful fashion when he crashed into the post after Duje Caleta-Car made a superb block to keep out his close-range effort.

Mount fired a free-kick narrowly over but England went on the defensive in the closing stages.

In the absence of the injured Harry Maguire, Tyrone Mings and John Stones were up to the task as England's centre-backs held firm to clinch a victory in their opening European Championship game for the first time.

Lukaku urges Eriksen to 'stay strong' as Belgium make winning start to Euro 2020

AFP | Sochi

Belgium striker Romelu Lukaku sent a message of support to his stricken Inter Milan team-mate Christian Eriksen after scoring, as his double helped the Red Devils open their Euro 2020 campaign with a 3-0 win over Russia on Saturday.

Lukaku gave Belgium an early lead in Saint Petersburg, then shouted "Chris, Chris, stay strong -- I love you" into a pitchside camera during the celebration for his opening goal.

Eriksen is recovering in hospital in Copenhagen after collapsing on the pitch during extraordinary scenes which overshadowed Denmark's 1-0 home defeat by Finland in Saturday's earlier Group B game.

"I am really happy with the win, but it was hard for me to play because my thoughts were with Christian Eriksen," said Lukaku, who revealed he cried



Romelu Lukaku sends a message of support to Christian Eriksen after scoring in Belgium's win over Russia

tears of concern before kick-off for his Inter team-mate.

Belgium coach Roberto Martinez admitted other members of his squad were also affected after seeing Eriksen suddenly slump to the turf during the Denmark-Finland game.

"We were watching the game live and five minutes after Christian collapsed, we went into a team meeting. As you can imagine, the last thing we wanted to do was talk about football," said Martinez.

"There were a lot of tears

"I am really happy with the win, but it was hard for me to play because my thoughts were with Christian Eriksen"

ROMELU LUKAKU

from players who have shared dressing rooms and big moments with Christian.

"All our thoughts go to him and his family, but also to the Danish team, as that was a really tough moment."

Substitute Thomas Meunier doubled Belgium's lead on 34 minutes before Lukaku put the result beyond doubt with a late second goal.

Belgium, the world's top-ranked team, are under pressure to deliver at the European Championship as some pundits claim this is Martinez's last chance to win a title with an

Pogacar warms up for Tour de France with home victory

AFP | Paris

Tadej Pogacar warmed up for the defence of his Tour de France title by winning the Tour of Slovenia yesterday as German Phil Bauhaus won the fifth and final stage into Novo Mesto.

"I've wanted this victory for a while and I am really happy with it," said Slovenian Pogacar, who rides for Team UAE.

"My condition is quite good, I will rest now for a while, do some more training and then

"My condition is quite good, I will rest now for a while, do some more training and then the Tour will start", he said, adding that it would be "more difficult than last year, for sure"

TADEJ POGACAR



Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium

the Tour will start", he said, adding that it would be "more difficult than last year, for sure".

Pogacar, who finished 1min 23.31sec ahead of Italian team-mate Diego Ulisse, had ridden his home tour three times before finishing fifth in 2017 and fourth in both 2018 and 2019.

After the Tour, which ends on July 18, Pogacar plans to compete in the Olympic road race in Japan on July 24.

"I want a holiday after the Olympics," he said.