

Despair turns to optimism as Mancini's Italy take shape

Reuters | Milan

The despair which followed Italy's defeat by Portugal a month ago has suddenly turned to unbridled optimism following Sunday's 1-0 stoppage-time win away to Poland in the Nations League.

Italian media agreed the performance was one of the best in the last few years as Roberto Mancini's new-look side dominated the match in Chorzow and created chances almost at will.

It was very different to the mood after Italy were outplayed by Portugal, prompting Gazzetta dello Sport to publish the headline "Italy always going downwards".

Yesterday, the same paper boomed: "This is Italy".

"Finally, Italy win and convince," it added.

A headline in Corriere dello Sport, meanwhile, simply read: "Bellissima."

Mancini was appointed with the job of rebuilding Italy following their failure to qualify for this year's World Cup, the first time they have missed the tournament in 60 years.

It was never going to be an easy task for the former Manchester City and Inter Milan coach.

Italy no longer produce world-



Italy's midfielder Nicolò Barella and Italy's defender Cristiano Biraghi (L) vie for the ball with Poland's forward Arkadiusz Milik

class players in abundance and teams such as Juventus, Napoli and AS Roma are dominated by foreigners, as Mancini pointed out last month.

But Mancini said there was still enough talent around to make Italy great again, even if it

was going to take time.

It was a case, he said, of putting faith in younger and lesser-known players and having patience.

There were certainly some interesting choices in Sunday's line-up.

Left back Cristiano Biraghi, who scored the winning goal, was relegated with Pescara two seasons ago and was making his third appearance for Italy at the age of 26.

With Italy struggling to break the deadlock, Mancini chose to

bring on Kevin Lasagna for his international debut at the age of 26 rather than Lazio's prolific marksman Ciro Immobile.

Lasagna, whose flick on at the near post set up the goal, has little more than two seasons of Serie A experience.

"Five years ago I was playing in Serie D (the fourth tier) and now, I'm making my debut for Italy," Lasagna said.

"I put Kevin and not Immobile because he's stronger in the air and we needed a few centimetres," said Mancini.

Another surprise choice was Cagliari's 21-year-old midfielder Nicolò Barella who made his debut in last Wednesday's 1-1 home draw with Ukraine and excelled on Sunday.

Mancini sent the team out in a 4-3-3 formation with no recognised striker.

Marco Veratti and Jorginho took control of the midfield and the attacking trio of Federico Chiesa, Federico Bernardeschi and Lorenzo Insigne caused Poland many problems.

"I wanted a team that plays at home and away with the same mentality," Mancini said.

"We are starting a new chapter but, in football, you need time and there are no magicians. We have simply started working and getting to know the players."

Turkish star Turan could face more than 12 years jail

AFP | Istanbul

Turkish prosecutors charged Barcelona player Arda Turan over a brawl with a prominent singer, asking for the footballer to be sentenced to twelve-and-a-half years in jail.

The prosecutors charged Turan, who is currently on loan to Istanbul's Basaksehir, with sexual harassment, unlicensed possession of weapons and causing intentional injury over the fight with singer Berkay Sahin, the state-run Anadolu news agency said.

Sahin, who goes on stage by his first name Berkay, was also charged, with prosecutors demanding up to two years in jail.

Turan, 31, had last week been summoned to an Istanbul police station to give a statement about the incident but was allowed to walk free.

The incident, which took place outside an Istanbul nightclub and reportedly left Sahin with a broken nose, has transfixed Turkey over the last days.

England fans disorder 'unacceptable': FA

AFP | Seville, Spain

The Football Association has condemned the behaviour of some England fans in Seville ahead of their team's UEFA Nations League match against Spain.

Riot police intervened on Sunday night to break up a group of English supporters who had been drinking and were behaving badly as they wandered round the centre of the Spanish city. There have been no confirmed arrests or injuries.

An FA statement read: "We condemn the unacceptable behaviour witnessed in Seville."

"With the Spain fixture still to come on Monday night, we urge those following the team to respect our hosts and act in a responsible manner."

Sainsbury, coach's son-in-law, eyes Soccerroos captaincy

AFP | Sydney

Trent Sainsbury has put his hand up to be the new Soccerroos captain, but his father-in-law, new coach Graham Arnold, is unlikely to make a long-term decision before their defence of the Asian Cup in January.

Australia has only had two permanent skipper over the past decade -- Lucas Neill and Mile Jedinak -- and Arnold is keen to make the right choice.

He oversees his first game in charge against Kuwait in Kuwait City and plans to trial three players in their three friendlies before the Asian Cup tournament.

Barca defensive problems mount with Vermaelen injury

Reuters | Barcelona

Barcelona were dealt a new defensive blow yesterday with news that centre back Thomas Vermaelen has been ruled out for six weeks with a torn hamstring as the stuttering La Liga champions prepare for a gruelling set of fixtures.

The Catalans were already short-staffed in central defence due to the prolonged absence of France international Samuel Umtiti, who is out with a knee problem and with no date set for his return.

"Medical tests carried out this Monday confirmed that Barca defender Thomas Vermaelen has suffered an injury to the biceps femoris of his right leg. He will be out approximately six weeks," Barca said in a statement.

"The injury happened on

Friday, when Vermaelen had to come off during Belgium's UEFA Nations League match versus Switzerland. Vermaelen will miss Belgium's coming match versus The Netherlands in Brussels, as well as upcoming Barca matches."

Barcelona only have two natural centre backs in Gerard Pique and Frenchman Clement Lenglet available for a demanding run of games starting with a top-of-the-table clash against Sevilla on Saturday.

Barca visit Inter Milan in the Champions League next Tuesday and play arch-rivals Real Madrid in the "Clasico" on Oct. 28.

Barca are second in the La Liga standings, one point behind Sevilla, although they are in the midst of a poor run of domestic results, having lost one and drawn three of their last four games.

Bolt fumes over drug test

AFP | Sydney

Sprint legend Usain Bolt says he's stunned after being handed a drug testing notice despite retiring from athletics and having no professional contract as he bids to launch a football career in Australia.

The 100m world record-holder quit athletics last year and is yet to be offered a deal by Australia's Central Coast Mariners, where he is currently on trial.

"So guys I've retired from track and field looking to become a footballer but look at this," Bolt said yesterday via an Instagram video as he zoomed in on the notice.

The demand for the out of competition test -- to collect urine and blood -- appears to have been issued by Football Federation Australia.

"How am I going to get a drug test today? I'm not even a professional footballer yet. Seriously," said Bolt.

"So I asked the lady, 'Why



Usain Bolt

am I getting drug tested when I haven't signed for a club yet?" and she said they told her I'm an elite athlete so I have to get tested. Okay then."

Despite his displeasure, it appears the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority guidelines mean he is eligible to be tested.

Their legislation defines an athlete as a "person who competes in sport" if "the sport has an anti-doping policy".

Del Potro suffers fractured kneecap after fall

Reuters | Shanghai

US Open runner-up Juan Martin del Potro has suffered a fractured right kneecap following his fall during a match in Shanghai this week, his spokesman said in a statement on Sunday.

Del Potro, who has been unlucky with injuries throughout his career, retired from his round-of-16 match against Borna Coric after falling heavily.

It's very difficult for me to think about recovery again, I did not expect this to happen

JUAN MARTIN DEL POTRO

The statement said that "the medical studies carried out on Saturday showed that Juan Martin del Potro suffered a



Juan Martin del Potro

fracture of his right patella bone in Shanghai".

"In the coming days, doctors will evaluate the recovery process needed to return."

The 30-year-old Argentine, who is ranked fourth in the world and had been enjoying one of the best seasons of his career, is wearing a splint on his right leg.

"It's a very difficult moment," he said. "I feel very sad. It's a hard blow that leaves me without strength."



Thomas Vermaelen