

Clinical Belgium put Finland on brink of exit

Romelu Lukaku seals Belgium win to leave Finland on the brink of Euro exit

● A Lukas Hradecky own goal and Romelu Lukaku strike gave Belgium a deserved victory

AFP | St Petersburg

Belgium scored two late goals to see off a valiant Finland 2-0 on Monday, pushing their opponents to the brink of a group-stage exit from Euro 2020 and sending Denmark through to the last 16.

Finnish goalkeeper Lukas Hradecky's 74th-minute own goal and Romelu Lukaku's third strike of the tournament ensured Roberto Martinez's Belgium finished top of Group B.

The world's number-one-ranked side will face a third-placed team in the next round on Sunday in Seville.

"We're making good progress and we'll be ready," Belgium midfielder Kevin De Bruyne told RTBF.

Finland finish third in the group, but appear unlikely to be one of the four best third-placed teams.

"We received tremendous support from the Finns," said Finland coach Markku Kanerva.

"They inspired us. We could not achieve our goal of taking at least one point. We are obvi-



Belgium's forward Romelu Lukaku (L) shoots to score their second goal

ously disappointed. I am proud of my team."

The other game saw Denmark thrash Russia 4-1 in Copenhagen to snatch second place and book a ticket to the last 16.

Finland knew they would only need a point to go through if the Danes won, but despite holding off Belgium for more than 70 minutes, they couldn't keep it up in the Saint Petersburg heat.

"There were no spaces, it was a little bit difficult," De Bruyne said.

Strong Belgium

This was arguably the strongest XI Belgium have fielded in the tournament so far, with captain Eden Hazard, De Bruyne

and Axel Witsel all starting after recent struggles with injury.

They did not take long to find their stride, with De Bruyne re-leasing Lukaku, who fired wide, before seeing a low cross hacked away by a panicking Finland defence.

The first half was largely played at a slow pace, but Belgium always looked dangerous when they moved the ball more quickly, with two such moves ending in Witsel and Hazard blasting over the crossbar.

The Red Devils showed what they are capable of shortly before half-time with a wonderful counter-attack led by Hazard, but Hradecky denied teenager

Jeremy Doku with a diving, one-handed save.

Hazard tried to win a penalty by falling near Finland defender Daniel O'Shaughnessy, but his appeals for a spot-kick were waved away.

Finland showed a little more adventure at the start of the second half, which left them more open at the back.

Hradecky pulled off a magnificent save to deny Hazard, but was beaten by Lukaku in the 65th minute.

However, the goal was ruled out by VAR for the tightest of offside decisions.

But Finland did fall behind, in agonising circumstances, as Thomas Vermaelen's header from a corner struck the post and crossbar before being nudged over his own line by Hradecky.



We received tremendous support from the Finns. They inspired us. We could not achieve our goal of taking at least one point. We are obviously disappointed. I am proud of my team

FINLAND COACH MARKKU KANERVA

Wembley to host more than 60,000 fans for Euro 2020 semis and final



General view of Wembley Stadium

AFP | London

Crowd capacity at Wembley Stadium will be increased to more than 60,000 fans for the semi-finals and final of Euro 2020, the British government said yesterday.

The new levels mean the stadium will be at 75 per cent capacity for the final three games, which conclude with the final on July 11.

All ticket holders will need to have either a negative COVID-19 test or proof of full vaccination - two doses received 14 days before the fixture.

The announcement came after Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi called on Monday for the final to be moved from England due to rising COVID-19 cases in the country.

Wembley's capacity has been set at 22,500 for the three group and the round of 16 match between Italy and Austria on June 26 but will rise to 40,000 for the other round of 16 match on June 29 which could feature England.

"We are thrilled that more fans will now be able to walk through the Wembley turnstiles and enjoy the finals of Euro 2020," said culture sec-



This tournament has been a beacon of hope to reassure people that we are returning to a more normal way of life and this is a further step along that road

UEFA PRESIDENT ALEKSANDER CEFERIN

retary Oliver Dowden.

"As we continue to make progress on our roadmap out of lockdown, keeping the public safe remains our top priority. We have worked extremely closely with UEFA and the FA to ensure rigorous and tight public health measures are in place whilst allowing more fans to see the action live," he said. UEFA has been negotiating with the UK government about relaxing quarantine restrictions on overseas fans travelling to London for games but there was no mention of any change in the statement.

Currently, COVID-19 regulations require visitors from most European countries to quarantine for 10 days after arriving in the UK.

Shakhtar Donetsk signs Brazilian defender Marlon



Sassuolo's defender Marlon controls the ball during a match (file photo)

AFP | London

Ukrainian runners-up Shakhtar Donetsk have signed Brazilian defender Marlon from Serie A side Sassuolo, the club announced yesterday.

The 25-year-old centre-back followed his former coach Roberto De Zerbi, who left Sassuolo for the Ukrainian club last month.

"I'm very happy. It's a great honour for me to sign a contract with Shakhtar. I feel like the chosen one," said Marlon, who signed a five-year deal.

"The club has the same goals and vision as I do. I moved here to help and be part of the team," he added.

Marlon, who becomes the 12th Brazilian on Shakhtar's roster, made 69 appearances

for Fluminense in his native Brazil.

He was loaned out to Barcelona in 2016 before signing a three-year contract the next year.

But the Brazilian made just two appearances in La Liga and one in the Champions League before moving to Sassuolo in 2018, where he played in 66 games, scoring one goal.

Shakhtar did not disclose the financial terms of the deal, but local media reported that the club paid Sassuolo at least 12 million euros (\$14.3 million).

Marlon is the club's third costly newcomer this off-season after fellow Brazilian midfielder Pedrinho and Burkino Faso forward Lassina Traore, both of whom joined Shakhtar after De Zerbi was appointed.

UEFA refuses to light Munich stadium in rainbow colours for Germany-Hungary match

AFP | Munich

UEFA's decision to block plans by Munich to light the Allianz Arena in rainbow colours for the Germany-Hungary Euro 2020 match was met yesterday with defiance in the Bavarian city which vowed to decorate other landmarks in protest at a law passed by the Hungarian government.

"UEFA is a politically and religiously neutral organisation," said European football's governing body in a statement ahead of Wednesday's match.

"Given the political context of this request -- a message aimed at a decision taken by the Hungarian national parliament -- UEFA must refuse."

Munich's mayor Dieter Reiter slammed UEFA's decision as "shameful" and announced plans to decorate other city landmarks in rainbow colours in defiance.

"I find it shameful that UEFA forbids us to send a sign for cosmopolitanism, tolerance, respect and solidarity with the people of the LGBTIQ community," he said.

He plans to put up rainbow-coloured flags at the Munich town hall and illuminate a huge wind turbine located close to the stadium, as well as the city's 291m-tall Olympic Tower.

Reiter had wanted the Allianz Arena -- owned by Bayern



General view outside Allianz Arena in rainbow colours after the match

Munich, but rented to UEFA for Euro 2020 -- in rainbow colours for the crucial Group F match to "send a visible sign of solidarity" with Hungary's LGBTIQ community.

In a statement yesterday, Bayern president Herbert Hainner said the Bundesliga giants would have been happy if their stadium had "shone in the rainbow colours".

Hungary's right-wing government last week passed a law banning the "promotion" of homosexuality to minors, outlawing any educational programmes or material in which homosexuality is mentioned.

UEFA's stance also drew criticism from Germany's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) community.

"We find it very disconcerting how UEFA deals with values

that should generally be accepted in society," Markus Ulrich, a spokesman for Germany's Lesbian and Gay Association (LSVD), told AFP subsidiary SID.

"UEFA has not recognised the signs of the times -- and it is clear to see which side it is taking with its decision."

Clement Beaune, France's openly gay minister for European affairs has also said he regretted UEFA's stance.

'Do it, Munich'

Even former England captain Gary Lineker was in favour of seeing the Allianz Arena in rainbow colours.

"Do it, Munich. Do it. Light it up for the world to see. Ah, just do it anyway," Lineker wrote on Twitter.

While the Allianz Arena will not be lit in rainbow colours on Wednesday, other football sta-



Hungary's government last week passed a law banning the "promotion" of homosexuality to minors, outlawing any educational programmes or material in which homosexuality is mentioned

diums in Germany will.

Berlin's iconic Olympic Stadium, as well as Bundesliga stadiums in Cologne, Frankfurt and Wolfsburg all plan to be colourfully lit.

"Cologne stands for diversity and tolerance. The developments in Hungary are frightening -- it is all the more important to set an example against this," a spokesman told AFP.

However, UEFA's stance was welcomed in Budapest, where Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto hailed the "right decision".

"The leadership of UEFA made the right decision by not assisting in a political provocation against Hungary," Szijjarto said yesterday in a statement sent to AFP.