



# Zlatan Floors Greece

Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored his first international goal for more than two and a half years to send Sweden on the way to a 2-0 Euro 2008 victory over champions Greece on Tuesday.

The striker, who last found the net for his country in October 2005, combined with partner Henrik Larsson to drive in a superb shot from the edge of the box after 67 minutes to break the deadlock in a dull game, Reuters reported.

Petter Hansson scrambled the second goal five minutes later to put Sweden level on points with Spain, who beat Russia 4-1 in the other Group D game earlier.

"It was a difficult game today," Ibrahimovic told reporters. "We won the game and that was the most important thing."

"I feel very happy and it couldn't have begun better. It wasn't an easy game for the strikers because they played with three central defenders."

Angelos Charisteas, scorer of the goal that won the 2004 title and one of six Greece survivors from that Lisbon final, had an early sight of goal after seven minutes when he cut in past two defenders on the right but scuffed his low shot.

Goalkeeper Andreas Isaksson also beat out an awkward, bouncing shot from Greece captain Angelos Basinas but spent most of his time watching from afar as the holders played possession football in their own half. In the other game Spain thrash Russia 4-1.

But coach Luis Aragonis believes that the win was not as comfortable as the score suggested.

"It looks as if this was an easy win but it wasn't like that," Aragonis told a news conference after striker David Villa bagged a hat-trick in the Euro 2008 Group D match.

The opening exchanges were evenly bal-

anced before Spain punished Russia on the break in the 20th minute, Villa notching his first goal after a lightning break from deep inside their own half.

they were putting us under heavy pressure we got the second. However, we are very good at playing the ball around when we have control and I'm very happy with the whole group."

Aragonis said that the big victory would have an affect on Spain's future opponents.

"This win will help us psychologically,"

he said. "A 4-1 win gives us a big boost and it is a win that will not just help us but is also good with a view to our next opponents because they are going to look at us with more respect."

"We must not carried away, however, as in four days we have a game against a difficult Sweden side."

Meanwhile, Villa said he was happier about Spain's emphatic 4-1 win over Russia in their opening Group D match on Tuesday than becoming the first player at Euro 2008 to score a hat-trick.

"I'm very pleased about the way things went, but especially for the three points we've now got under our belts," the 26-year-old striker told reporters.

"We all said it was vital to start with a win and we did just that. I'm also happy for the goals but that's the job I have to do."

Meanwhile on Thursday Croatia face Germany while Austria host Poland. In Group C and on Friday Italy meet Romania and in peak of the group game The Netherlands face France.



Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic attends a press conference at the Swedish training camp in Lugano, Switzerland, on June 8.

## News in Brief

### Daei Signs Contract

Following the victory over UAE, Iran Football Federation signed a three-year contract with Ali Daei to serve as the national team's coach on Tuesday.

Head of Iran's Football Federation, Ali Kafashian announced that Daei's contract was signed.

"This is a three-year contract and each year it will automatically be renewed upon agreement by the two sides," sports daily 'Iran Varzeshi' quoted him as saying.

This shows that IFF has considered things like failure to participate in World Cup 2010.

Price of the contract is undisclosed but Kafashian said it is Daei's job to reveal this. Daei said after official signing that he will not disclose the price.

Iran's coach told reporters prior to the training session on Tuesday that people have to be patient.

"Iran's football has not fully developed in the last 30 years," he said, Mehr News Agency reported.

Referring to the progress made in Asian football, he added, "Football in the continent is not comparable with what it was a decade ago."

### Kazemian Joins Ajman

Iranian high profile midfielder Javad Kazemian has signed a one year deal with the newly promoted UAE Professional League Ajman football club on Tuesday.

He was a member of last season's Emirates champions Al Shabab. Ali Samereh, his compatriot, has already joined Ajman reportedly earning one million dollar and this is while Kazemian's fee is undisclosed, Mehr News Agency reported.

He said, "I think I have made a good decision as always, at the same time, I like living in the Emirates."

Ajman plans to stay in the UAE Professional League in the upcoming season and does not care about its position in the table, Kazemian declared.

This former Persepolis player has not been invited to Iran's football team for the 2010 World Cup qualifications.

### Beckham Leads MLS Fan Balloting

Major League Soccer fans' love affair with English import David Beckham shows no sign of fading.

The Los Angeles Galaxy superstar midfielder is the overwhelming leader in fan voting for the 2008 MLS All-Star Game, almost a month into online balloting, AFP reported.

The voting, which closes July 2, accounts for 25 percent of the MLS All-Star first team selections, with coaches and general managers (25 percent), players (25 percent) and media (25 percent) also having a say on which players are named to the starting lineup.

Those selected will play in the 13th annual MLS All-Star Game against English Premiership club West Ham United in Toronto on July 24.

Beckham, who has scored four goals for the Galaxy this season, isn't the only Los Angeles player fans are backing.

Teammate Landon Donovan, who leads the league with nine goals, leads the group of forwards.

### Murray Set for Grass Court Return

Andy Murray says he is looking forward to kicking-off his grass court season at the Queen's Club after missing out last year because of a wrist injury.

Murray counts down to Wimbledon with his first competitive singles game on grass for nearly two years on Tuesday against France's Sebastien Grosjean, BBC reported.

"I feel pretty relaxed, I haven't thought about any pressure or anything," said the world number 11.

"I'm looking forward to being back just because I missed everything last year."

Murray, who is seeded six at the Artois Championships in west London, faces Grosjean in the second round after receiving a first-round bye.

He is also playing in the doubles and his pairing with Venezuelan Daniel Vallverdu beat Richard Gasquet and Nicolas Mahut on Monday.

Grosjean, 30, beat South African qualifier Rik De Voest on Monday and has twice reached the tournament final, in 2003 and 2004.

## Ballack Worried About Croatia

Germany captain Michael Ballack says his team are wary of England-slayers Croatia ahead of Thursday's Euro 2008 Group B clash which will guarantee the winner a last eight berth.

The 31-year-old Chelsea midfielder was outstanding in his side's 2-0 opening victory over Poland on Sunday as two goals from Bayern Munich's Lukas Podolski got

Germany off to a flying start, AFP reported.

But Croatia beat England twice in their qualifying campaign to deny the English a Euro 2008 berth and Ballack says Germany must raise

their game if they want to reach the quarter-finals and beyond.

"We are at 80-85 percent of our full potential, but we have to orientate ourselves towards Thursday's opponents," said Ballack.

"We will have a much different task against Croatia, they also want to be European champions and they beat England twice, which is no easy feat."

"We will know our true level after the game, we can be content with our win against Poland, but we have to raise our game, because we will come across stronger teams in the tournament like Croatia."

Germany coach Joachim Loew has tapered down his squad's training in the build-up to Thursday night's match in Klagenfurt, Austria, to let his team recover, but he will demand the same accomplished performance.

## Woods Ready For US Open

Tiger Woods says he will be ready for Thursday's US Open as he continues his recovery from a knee operation.

Woods had knee surgery almost two months ago and has yet to play a competitive round since the operation, BBC reported.

But he said, "I'm good to go. Come game time on Thursday I'll be ready. It's a matter of now getting the feel of playing again."

"Is it fully recovered? Probably not, but it's no big deal. I've won tournaments like that before."

The operation is the third Woods has had on his left knee but he insisted

his comeback was progressing smoothly, if slowly.

"I've been around an entire 18, but only as part of a corporate outing," said the world number one.

"I've been practising quite a bit. I've just started to play some holes. I've been kind of slowly building up towards that. I'm not trying to take it too hard."

"My practice sessions have increased. They have gotten a little bit more intense. I've been out there for longer duration and everything's been holding up well, which is a good sign."

Woods, who won his first tournament back after knee surgery in December 2002, admitted he was eager to return to action as soon as possible.

## Bryant Leads Lakers To Win

Kobe Bryant scored 36 points with an MVP-worthy performance, Sasha Vujacic added 20 points and the Lakers, teetering on the brink of falling into an impossible hole in the NBA finals, beat the Boston Celtics 87-81 in Game 3 on Tuesday night, AP reported.

LA's brightest sports star, Bryant was California cool.

"What I tried to do with my teammates is just stay calm," he said.

"It wasn't the end of the world. They did a great job of defending home court. We knew we had to come here and do the same. They feed off of my confidence and I have all the confidence in

the world that we can come here and win."

A change of time zones, jerseys and attitude did wonders for the Lakers, who staggered home from Boston in an 0-2 hole and couldn't afford to fall any further behind in the first best-of-seven matchup between the league's marquee teams since 1987. Vujacic, the self-proclaimed 'Machine', made three 3-pointers, including a crucial one from the left corner with 1:53 left that gave the Lakers an 81-76 lead. Pau Gasol finally flexed his muscles with two inside baskets in the fourth quarter and Derek Fisher, who took an \$8 million pay cut to come back and play for the Lakers, made two free throws with 1:33 remaining as the Lakers held on.

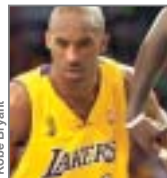
Game 4 is Thursday night at the Staples Center, where the Lakers are 9-0 in the playoffs and unbeaten in 15 games since March 28.



Michael Ballack



Tiger Woods



Kobe Bryant