Beat: Sports

UEFA EURO 2016: Italy-Sweden 1-0

Hard to beat and clinical in attack

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USPA NEWS - The game looked to be heading towards a dull goalless draw before Eder raced onto Zaza's knockdown to drive home from the edge of the box. Sweden failed to produce a shot on goal for the second successive game, with captain and star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic kept quiet throughout.

Italy have scored three goals and conceded none in their two games so far. Prior to the tournament, Italy coach Antonio Conte had played down his side's chances of success in France, citing an ageing squad and a lack of upcoming talent as reasons for fans to temper their expectations. In their opening group game at Euro 2016, they caught the eye as they outfoxed one of the tournament favourites in Belgium with patient and well-organised football.

Italy, though, had no such luck against a conservative Sweden side, who were content to sit deep. Eder's place in the team had been questioned after a record of just two international goals prior to this game, but coach Antonio Conte kept faith with the forward and was rewarded with the winner. Eder (17) had played for 88 minutes but found the energy to cover plenty of distance and pick up Zaza's knock down before racing to the edge of the box and scoring

For 88 minutes, the tactic worked but this Italy side is built upon a foundation of being defensively solid and clinical in attack.
That latter quality was illustrated when Brazilian-born striker Eder scored in the closing stages with only Italy's second shot on target, driving brilliantly into the left corner of Andreas Isaksson's net. Zlatan Ibrahimovic, pictured here scoring against Italy at Euro 2004, has scored six goals in 12 games for Sweden, but failed to make much impact against Italy

Ibrahimovic is well versed in the defensive style of football Italy is famed for, having spent seven seasons in Serie A playing for Juventus, Milan and Inter. But prior to Friday's game, Ibrahimovic had faced the Azzurri just once before - at Euro 2004. He scored with an outrageous flick late in that game, denying Italy a victory that ultimately cost them a place in the knockout stages. It would have taken another piece of individual brilliance for him to score against Italy again, as Sweden's lack of creativity offered him little to work with, a scenario that often saw him dropping deep in order to build an attack.
The former Paris St-Germain forward did balloon a shot over from three yards out but his blushes were spared by the offside flag.

Italy coach Antonio Conte said: "Many were even doubting us going through and the fact we're into the last 16 after just two games is a huge satisfaction. I'm pleased for these lads because they deserve a lot and hope these wins gain us more confidence because we started with the wheels deflated and now we're trying to pump these wheels up with every game."
Sweden coach Erik Hamren said: "We defended well and we really succeeded in closing down Italy's game, but it was only towards the end of the game that we lost a bit of concentration.
"I think Zlatan did what he needed to do in the last two matches. It was tough for him today because Italy defended very well, but we had more of the ball than we did against Ireland and of course a centre forward needs the support of wingers. Zlatan is one of the greatest forwards I have ever met. He is a winner and if he's disappointed, I think everybody can accept and understand that - we all are disappointed."

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