Italia Moves On

Bryan Solomon (June 18, 2016)



Italy beat Sweden 1-0 Friday to punch their ticket to move on to the round of 16. Despite poor play from both sides, Eder put Italy ahead in the closing minutes of the close match.

Italy has qualified for the knockout stage of the Euro Cup with their 1-0 victory against Sweden. Late in the match, Eder put Italy in front with a powerful strike as he created space amongst Sweden’s tough backline.

After an impressive victory against Belgium earlier this week, Italy looked much weaker and played with less direction than hoped.

They played with less discipline today, unable to replicate the passing and movement that they played so well with against Belgium. While they continued their dismal play in the second half, they were able to produce more promising counter attacks than in the first 45 minutes, showing that they recognized the need to step up.

Italy head coach Antonio Conte's main strategy was to limit Sweden's Zlatan Ibrahimovic's production, which Italy's impressive defensive trio of Andrea Barzagli, Leonardo Bonucci, and Giorgio Chiellini succeeded in doing. Aiming to be the first man to score in four different European Championships, the former Serie A superstar failed to convert on his few opportunities, the best of which came from a header on the left side of the goal that he failed to direct.

Sweden continued their European Championship with another disappointing performance, with poor setups for their attack and failure to convert by their star. While they dominated possession for most of the game, Sweden appeared too cautious to really threaten Italy, failing to register a shot on target for the second time this tournament. Despite the lackluster play, Sweden's defense proved to be prepared for Italy's attack and seemingly unbreakable until the late minutes of the game.

Now that Italy has booked their ticket to the second round, they will prepare for their match on Wednesday at 9 p.m. against Republic of Ireland and wait for the results of the Belgium and Republic of Ireland's match this Saturday.

Republic of Ireland are expected to be more of a challenge than Sweden, who only rely on Ibrahimovic to generate any chance at scoring. With a guaranteed spot in the round of 16, Italy should play with a little less stress knowing their immediate future is taken care of. If Ireland fails to beat Belgium Saturday, Italy will automatically win the group.

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