Euro hosts Germany pass Denmark test but clouds remain

AFP- Germany are through to the quarter finals of a major tournament for the first time in eight years, but clouds remain for Julian Nagelsmann's Euro 2024 hosts.
The home side won 2-0 in Dortmund, coming up not only against a determined and organised Denmark, but also a 25-minute thunderstorm delay which derailed Germany's early momentum.

In a match Nagelsmann called "bizarre" and "wild", Germany needed a fair share of luck to get past the Danes, with two VAR reviews within a minute going in favour of the hosts.

Nagelsmann's unforced changes to his starting XI will also come under fire, particularly the decision to replace the in-form Florian Wirtz with Leroy Sane, who had another frustrating night.

Having ridden out the storm on Saturday, Germany will hope for a clearer week ahead, particularly with a potential clash with in-form Spain on the horizon.

– Selection changes –

The first surprise of an unpredictable evening came when the starting XI was announced, with Nagelsmann making two changes to his starting line-up – the first time he has done so in 2024.

Since sweeping the broom through Germany's squad in March, only injuries have stopped Nagelsmann playing his strongest XI.

Nagelsmann's decision to replace the defensive-focused Maximilian Mittelstaedt with the attack-minded David Raum was

a reward for the latter's assist for Niclas Fuellkrug's late equaliser against Switzerland.

The other unforced change was difficult to understand, with Nagelsmann dropping Wirtz for Sane, who showed pace but struggled with control and timing.

Nagelsmann explained the decision, saying he wanted to "reward a good week of training, as well as bring some speed into the game.

"(Sane) has got different characteristics than Flo."

Wirtz, 21, came on with nine minutes remaining and was an immediate upgrade, holding up possession and finding runners.

The coach's decision to again pick Kai Havertz over Fuellkrug also raised eyebrows, despite the Arsenal forward converting a second-half penalty.

In general play, Havertz had a number of chances but could not break through. His 10th-minute volley was saved by Danish goalie Kasper Schmeichel, with the goalkeeper gobbling up a tame Havertz header from point-blank range shortly before the break.

With Germany 1-0 up and 30 minutes remaining, Havertz broke through with only the goalkeeper to beat. The goal would have sealed the game for Germany but Havertz chipped wide.

Fortunately for Germany, Jamal Musiala had killer instinct when it mattered, scoring on the counter with 22 minutes remaining to wrap up the game.

Musiala has now scored in three of Germany's four games at Euro 2024, the 21-year-old having established himself as the hosts' most reliable attacking force.

— 'We can be beaten' —

The match again highlighted Germany's noted problems from dead-ball situations.

A pre-tournament talking point, Germany conceded an own goal from a set piece against Scotland. Against Hungary, Nagelsmann's side were fortunate when a free-kick goal was ruled out for offside.

Minutes into the second-half, Denmark took a free kick which pinged around the box before Joachim Andersen turned it in.

A lengthy VAR review showed Andersen was a mere centimetre offside.

In the post-match press conference, Denmark manager Kasper Hjulmand held up his phone to show the VAR images, telling reporters "it's one centimetre.

"It doesn' make sense. It's not how we are supposed to be using VAR."

Moments after the goal was disallowed, Germany went up the other end and won a penalty, but the way Andersen was able to get a shot away despite the attention of several flat-footed Germany defenders will concern the coach.

With the quarter finals in sight, defender Joshua Kimmich summed up the uneven nature of the match – and Germany's tournament so far.

"We're on a good run," the Bayern Munich defender said, adding "we know that we can beat anyone – but that we can also be beaten."

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