Spain and France to face off in Euros last four, Turkey lament ‘unfair’ Demiral ban

AFP- Spain will face France in the semi-finals of Euro 2024 after knocking out hosts Germany as Turkey reacted with dismay to defender Merih Demiral’s two-match ban for making an alleged ultra-nationalist salute.
Luis de la Fuente’s Spain triumphed 2-1 in an engrossing match between the two best-performing teams at the tournament, thanks to Mikel Merino heading home Dani Olmo’s cross just as the match looked destined for a penalty shoot-out.

“This is a winning horse… I’m proud to coach players like this, players that are insatiable,” said De la Fuente.

It was a tough end to the tournament for Germany, who pushed Spain all the way and took the match to extra time with Florian Wirtz’s 89th-minute strike which levelled Olmo’s opener for La Roja.

“We played a good tournament but when you’re so close, to be eliminated like that, it’s bitter,” said Toni Kroos after his final Germany match.

Spain now will be favourites to claim a record-breaking fourth European crown after their seventh straight win inspired by Olmo, who replaced injured Pedri after just eight minutes following a clash between the Barcelona midfielder and Kroos.

They came through a huge test against the Germans in Stuttgart and will pose a completely different kind of problem to France, who beat Portugal 5-3 on penalties after a drab match finished goalless after extra time.

Theo Hernandez coolly struck home the winning spot-kick as France went through to the last four despite their only goals

from open play in the tournament being scored by opposition players.

Joao Felix was the only player to miss in the shoot-out, striking the base of post, meaning that Portugal go home and ageing icon Cristiano Ronaldo failed to score a goal at a major tournament for the first time in his career.

France have reached the semis in four of the last five tournaments and coach Didier Deschamps said: “We mustn’t take that for granted, that’s what I always say. It’s what all the players in the team deserve.”

– Demiral ban anger –

Turkey’s government blasted as “unfair and biased” Demiral’s ban, which means he misses Saturday’s last-eight clash with the Netherlands and that his Euros campaign is over unless Vincenzo Montella‘s team reach the final.

Demiral was the unlikely hero with a brace in Turkey’s 2-1 win over Austria in the last 16 and during celebrations for his second goal made a gesture associated with Turkish right-wing extremist group Grey Wolves.

UEFA banned Demiral for, among other things, “violating the basic rules of decent conduct”, a move which Turkey’s Sports Minister Osman Askin Bak claimed was politically motivated and Montella said was based on a “misunderstanding”.

“It wasn’t a political gesture as it was interpreted,” insisted Montella, who added that the wolf gesture is a “symbol of the Turks”.

Turkey will have a vociferous backing in Berlin for a match which will be attended by the country’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who claimed Demiral was just “showing his excitement”.

– Bellingham to face Swiss –

England will have Jude Bellingham available for their quarter-final with Switzerland after he was handed a reprieve by UEFA for his crotch-grabbing celebration after keeping the Three Lions in the competition in the last 16.

Bellingham, who has scored twice in Germany, was filmed mimicking the gesture while apparently looking towards Slovakia’s bench following his stunning stoppage-time overhead kick which took that match to extra time.

Coach Gareth Southgate called UEFA’s ruling, which allows him to select his star player, a “common sense” decision.

“I think there was no intent in the gesture towards anybody other than the communication he has with his family,” claimed Southgate.

A win over the Swiss, who dumped out Italy in the last 16, would set up a semi-final with Turkey or the Dutch as England look to break a 58-year major tournament duck.

AFP