

Spain send Italy out on penalties for semi-final spot

Spain edged their way into the semi-finals of Euro 2008 Sunday night with a 4-2 penalty shoot-out win over world champions Italy, after a tense game finished goalless after extra-time in Vienna.

Goalkeeper Iker Casillas was the Spanish hero, saving penalties from Daniel De Rossi and Antonio Di Natale.

'Penalties are a bit of a lottery though we did deserve to win,' the Real Madrid keeper said.

'I really believed we were going to score, right until the end.'

He said that it was 'a hard game, because of the heat and the tension...In the end, we had the luck that we have been short of before.'

Spain's winning penalty was put away by supersub Cesc Fabregas - to the delight of the 12,000 Spaniards, including the king and queen, in the Ernst Happel Stadium.

Luis Aragones' young team deserved to go through, since they dominated possession from start to finish and created the better goal chances.

Italy, in contrast, were content to play out a draw and test their luck in the shoot-out, hoping for a repeat of the 2006 World Cup final against France.

Spain - the only one of the four group winners to reach the semis - will now face surprise package Russia Thursday.

The shootout win ends Spain's June 22 penalty jinx.

On June 22, 1986 Spain lost to Belgium in a dramatic World Cup quarter-final shoot-out, then against England in Euro 1996 on the same date 10 years later.

And it was June 22, 2002 that the Spaniards lost to hosts South Korea in the 2002 World Cup quarters.

As expected, Spain dominated possession but failed to translate their dominance into clear goal chances.

Valencia strikers David Villa and David Silva several times came close to breaking the tense deadlock for Spain.

Italy keeper Gianluigi Buffon, in the 81st minute, fumbled a long shot from Marcos Senna on his post.

The nearest that the ultra-cautious Italians came to scoring was in the 61st minute, when Casillas saved a Mauro Camoranesi shot with his left leg.

(© IANS / India eNews)